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TO THE END OF *The* TRAIL



FRANK LEWIS NAYLON



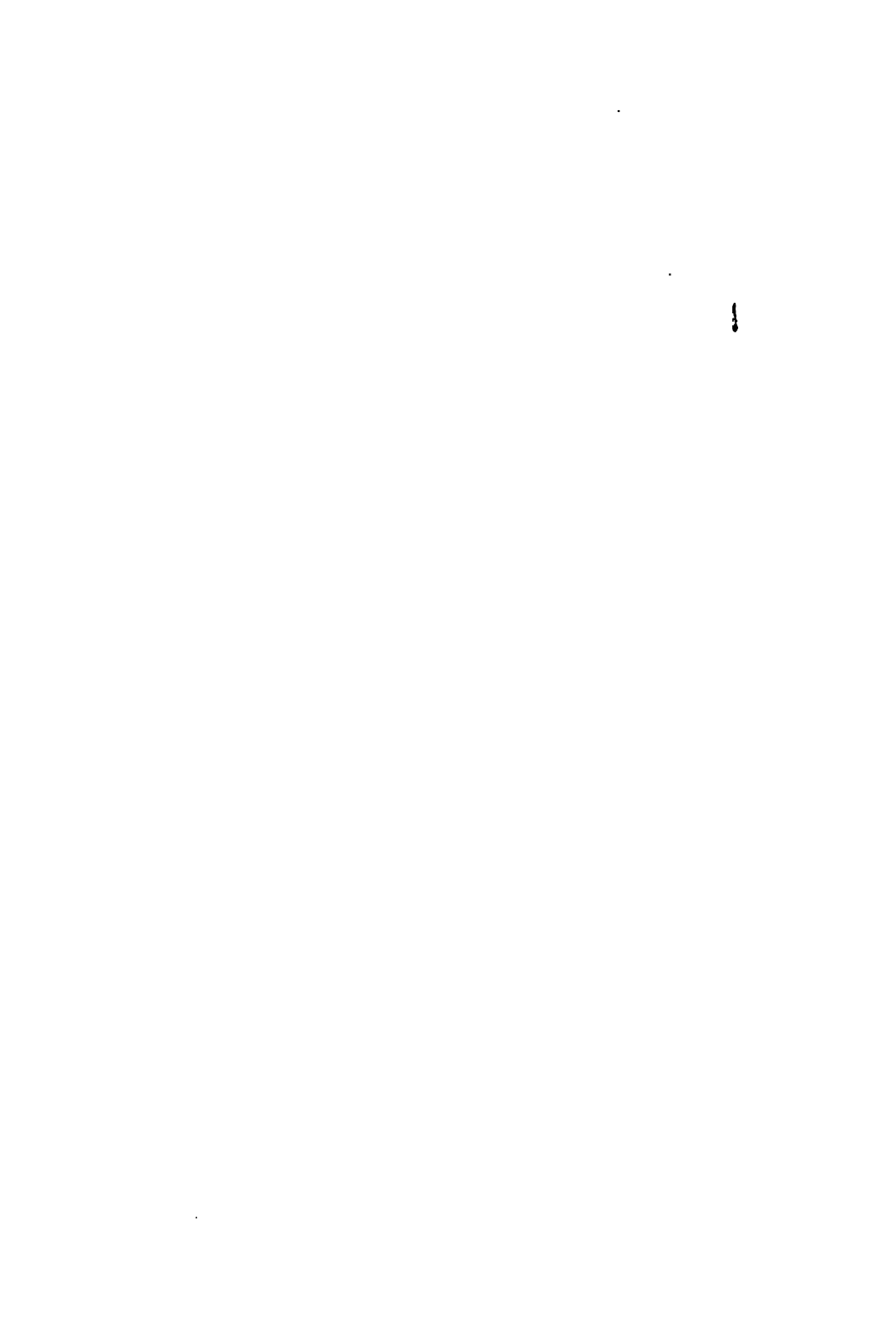
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TO THE END OF THE TRAIL

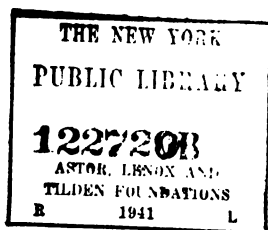
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Wm. L.

TO MY WIFE



PRELUDE

*We cannot live alone.
Nor thought, nor act, nor deed that plays upon our souls,
As wimpling winds upon a quiet pool,
But leads and drags and thrusts another life
In paths it would not tread.*

*We cannot live alone.
Nor thought, nor act, nor deed that sways our souls
To heights of noble life, or depths of nothingness,
For these a righteous judge shall hold us not alone.
“Thy brother’s keeper! Render thine account!”*

*Our lives we live alone.
Stretch out imploring hands! Cry out in deep despair!
The longing hand shall beat unseen,
The mocking echo of our voice shall roll
Back from the burstless circle of ourselves.*

*Our lives we live alone.
No soothing voice, no balming look can bridge the space
That parts us, soul from soul,
That thrusts us back within the hollow of ourselves.
No voice but God’s; and that is far away.*

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TO THE END OF THE TRAIL

CHAPTER I

DRY CREEK

"HELLO, partner!"

"Hello to you!"

"How's goat-ranging?"

"Can't complain. How's — er — er —"

"Tramping? Dry and not especially filling."

The tramp slowly swung his blankets from his shoulder, and laying them on the ground, seated himself, thrusting his bended knees between his clasped hands. The other sat sideways on his horse, crossing one leg over the horn of the saddle, the bridle loose in his hands. His horse stood with braced legs, drooping head, and closed eyes, dreaming, evidently, from the pendulous, working lips, of sucking up sweet water or gathering juicy herbage. The horseman turned lazily to the seated figure.

"Traveled far?"

"From Bed Rock."

"How's things down there?"

"Oh, rustling mavericks and scrapping as usual. Are n't troubled up here, are you?"

THE END

"No, too dry for cattle. Had a little trouble at first over limits; but we compromised. You can do anything, even with cowboys, if you treat them square."

This remark was delivered with a satisfied air that denoted finality.

The tramp looked up with a questioning half smile, but said nothing.

The wide, concave cylindrical valley was dotted here and there with groups of browsing Angoras, each group with its self-important sentinel standing with bunched feet on a huge rock from the bounding cliffs, with pendant beard wagging from grinding jaws. The horseman threw his leg astride and thrust his feet in the stirrups. The horse, wakened from his pleasing dream, champed discontentedly on the dry bits.

"Are you looking for a job?"

A pair of shrewdly shallow blue eyes pointed from a handsome mustached face.

"I was n't thinking of it particularly; but I'll take one."

"Not quite broke yet, eh?" with a knowing smile.

"No, not quite." The tramp laughed quietly.

"Ever herded goats?"

"No, but I've ridden a cattle range."

"How'll forty a month and grub suit you?"

"First-rate."

"When'll you go to work?"

"Now."

"That's good. Let's go to the house for dinner. Then we'll get your outfit together and I'll show you the herders' cabin."

"You have n't been here long?" the tramp asked.

"Little over a year. I looked around a good bit before I picked this place. They tried to rope me in at Montrose and Delta, but I did n't rope. Then I heard of Paradox. It took my fancy someway, the name did; but I did n't get farther than here."

"Where's old Mizzou? He was here the last time I went through."

"I bought him out. He'd got sick of the place. You see, he's one of those restless fellows that would n't stick in quicksand."

The tramp smiled, but said nothing.

"You know this country, I judge?" The horseman looked at the tramp interrogatively.

"Yes, fairly well. I've been in the San Juan for the last ten years."

"You're not a native, then?"

"No; I came from the East."

"That so? What part?"

"Massachusetts."

"So did I. Well, here we are. Guess the place has changed a little since you saw it."

The tramp looked around approvingly.

"Yes, decidedly," he said.

Within an inclosed, irrigated space bunches of cactus flourished, putting out delicate flowers from

grotesque angles and into awkward shapes under the benign influence of abundant water. Clumps of thrifty sage loaded the air with its pungent aroma, clusters of yerba buena tossed yellow heads, grimacing derisively at the burning sands without. Clambering vines of purple-flowered clematis half hid in cooling shadows the wide piazza that reached out from the curving earth-covered roof of the adobe range house.

The horseman, while tying his horse, noted the look of approbation.

"You see, I've brought my wife out here," he said in explanation.

Dry Creek was not an ideal place for a honeymoon; but if love can idealize and make beautiful a city flat, there is no reason why it should not be equally successful with an adobe hut surrounded by sagebrush and cactus. Besides, if the adobe is one's own, as well as a wide goat range, that, at least, is a point in its favor as compared with a city flat. Whether the comparison ever occurred to the very recent Mrs. Mary Ingalls, it hardly matters. It certainly does not alter the fact that the exclusive and undisputed ownership of a house is a very great pleasure in itself.

On either hand, in the nearer distance, rose great cliffs of brown sandstone that formed the side walls of the box cañon of Dry Creek. Underneath the cliffs the long, steep-sloped talus was covered with scraggy piñon and cedar, grading abruptly into the nearly level, but yet concave

bottom of Dry Creek. To the east the cañon narrowed and rose to meet the level mesa whose rim formed the eastern sky line ; to the west it widened and deepened till it was closed in the distance by the timbered slopes and snow-clad peaks of the La Sal Mountains.

As a rule, Dry Creek deserved its name. Only during the rainy season, or an occasional cloud-burst, was it a misnomer. On these occasions from a thousand crevices in the cliffs there poured forth gushing streams of muddy water, and these, hastening toward the parched creek-bed, transformed it into a moving mass of red mud that crawled rather than ran, towards the Dolores. On its way the stream grew thicker with the masses of adobe that it tore from its startled banks, and then woe to the luckless kine or traveler that was caught in its flood !

But the adobe banks took toll as well as gave, and from the moving mass sucked moisture that nourished thrifty clumps of yerba buena and an occasional cottonwood, that lifted its ghostly scragginess high above the stream bed and gave notice, to whom it might concern, that water could be found there, occasionally at least.

After these periodic assertions of its vested rights and titles to its bed, Dry Creek claimed the balance of its prerogatives by adorning its banks with crusts of white alkali, and impregnating its occasional pools with the same nauseating salt, to the point where man and beast drank of it only because it was wet.

"Come in." Ingalls hospitably held open the little gate, with a glance at the calm, brown-eyed woman who stood on the piazza.

"My wife, Mrs. Ingalls. Mm — er" — He looked inquiringly at the tramp.

"Chase — William Chase." He smiled easily, acknowledging the introduction.

Mrs. Ingalls felt an aversion to tramps in general, but she noted with approval the firm, well-knit figure as she answered: —

"Will you come in, Mr. Chase? Unless" — she looked at Chase's swinging blankets apprehensively; but they evidently passed inspection — "you prefer the piazza. It's cooler."

Chase swung his blankets from his shoulder to the floor, and stood leaning against one of the posts of the piazza.

"You must find it rather lonely out here, Mrs. Ingalls. It's a great change from New England. You said New England?" looking at Ingalls.

Ingalls nodded assent to his inquiry. He answered the question addressed to his wife.

"Oh, I don't know about that. Change, of course. But Mrs. Ingalls is dreadfully in love with everything so far, — the dear little conies, the dignified ground hogs, and all that sort of thing; something different every day."

"They are dear and dignified, are n't they, Mr. Chase? Here's Waddles now. Is n't he dignified, even as a suppliant?"

A fat, gray ground hog waddled up to Mary and

sat, shaking his forepaws up and down as if emphasizing wise remarks.

"I'm very glad to agree with you, Mrs. Ingalls. I've always thought so."

"Umph," grunted Ingalls. "That's all well enough for sentiment, but when they dig holes that you stumble into, and eat up your crops, that's business, and mighty unpleasant, too."

Mary began to reply, but ended with, "There's something burning; excuse me, please."

Ingalls followed his wife into the house.

"Who's Mr. Chase?" Mary asked in the seclusion of the kitchen.

"How do I know? I don't keep track of every tramp that turns up," her husband answered.

"Tramp?" repeated Mary. "He's no tramp." Ingalls laughed.

"Going to put a halo on tramps, too?"

"I tell you he is n't a tramp. He's a gentleman."

In spite of a warning look from Mary, Ingalls burst into a hearty laugh.

"Did his blankets pass inspection? I saw you looking at them," he added mischievously.

"Indeed they did!" She spoke decidedly. "They were n't thrown together. Now come," she added; "dinner's ready."

"I hope experience will keep up your illusions," Ingalls said, as he stood aside for his wife to pass.

"They are n't illusions," she retorted. "They are conclusions."

The little dinner table was attractively set forth. The linen was snow white, and in the centre a jardinière glowed crimson with delicate cacti. They chatted easily of their former homes, and the thousand and one things so dear when so far away. Each was strengthened in his first impressions.

"You have n't given me a chance to tell you that Mr. Chase is going to help me herding."

"It's quite a distance to the cabin." Ingalls turned to Chase. "I guess you'll have to look out for yourself. You're used to that, I take it."

"Sure thing."

"Are you really going on the range?" asked Mary. There was a slight surprise manifest. The man and the position seemed incongruous.

"Yes, if I prove acceptable." There was a faint challenge in his tone in reply to her surprise.

"I hope you won't prove as attractive as those wretched goats. I've hardly seen Mr. Ingalls since we came out here. He has spent most of his time on the range." She rose as she spoke and led the way to the door. Outside the dazzling sun beat pitilessly on the sand, in harsh contrast to the subdued light of the dining-room.

"My extra riding outfit is n't a very good one." Ingalls turned inquiringly to Chase.

"That does n't matter for a day or two," replied Chase. "When you go to Manzanita, if you'll call at Tice's he'll give you mine. It's stored there. You're going to-morrow, are n't you?"

"Yes; I think I'll have to. Anything else?"

"How about cooking outfit at the cabin?" inquired Chase.

"If you'll make out a list of what you want I'll do the best I can with what we've got, and bring the rest from Manzanita."

Chase took out a note-book and pencil and wrote hastily for a moment. He tore out the leaf and handed it to Ingalls.

"That will do for a month."

Ingalls drew a bunch of keys from his pocket and opened the door of a small storeroom that stood apart from the house. Both entered and busied themselves sacking beans, bacon, coffee, sugar, and other fundamentals; a scant list, but the great West has grown to what it is on far less sumptuous fare. The parcels were wrapped in gunny-sacks and packed on a patient burro. Then Chase, with Ingalls, turned and rode away across the valley, where shimmering heat waves wriggled up from scorching sand only to meet the steady down-beat of the fervid sun; around bunches of cactus with leathery skins and subtle spines, through clumps of chaparral that put out dusty leaves from behind their barrier of thorns, every plant and shrub bristling a *cave canem* to the tactless marauders who should seek to prey upon them.

Deep in the earth great roots swelled and thrust, sucking up the last drop of moisture from the grudging soil and storing it away in well-protected vaults. Everything spoke of the merciless struggle for self. And yet once each year the miserly

plants poured out their treasured hoard in delicate flowers that loaded the air with perfume, and dotted the desert with glowing colors, tiny microcosms that reflect the greed of mankind, that grinds and grasps and bites and stings all the world, only to pour forth the spoils of strife into the protected lap of the one it loves.

They reached the cabin and dismounted. It was an adobe, like the range house, only smaller. Inside, a rude bunk and undecided table, with X-legged chairs, completed the inventory of furniture, unless were included rusty knives and forks. An adobe fireplace was strewn with charred sticks, and an iron frying-pan was half buried in the ashes.

Ingalls looked uneasily at Chase.

"Pretty tough layout for a Christian," he ventured tentatively.

"Oh, I've seen worse in this man's country," was the reassuring answer. "By the way, I wish you'd tell Tice to give you my trunk. I've got some plunder in there that may come in handy."

Ingalls entered a memorandum on his list.

"There's one good thing, anyway. There's a sweet spring at the foot of the slide. No better water in New England, even. I'll show you."

At the spring they sat down and drank of the grateful water.

"That is good," assented Chase. "A man might give up a good many things for water like that."

"Lucky for me there's so little of it, though. I would n't have had this range if there'd been a hundred inches instead of three."

"Guess you're right," answered Chase. "It's magnificent farming land here if it had water."

"I had a little scrap to keep it, as it was. Some coyote dug a hole down there and called it a mine. Located this place for water. It did n't work, though." He rose to go as he spoke. "Guess you'd better corral the goats every night. Coyotes are pretty thick, and they're getting worse. Now, don't stand on ceremony. Come down to the house when you feel like it, and let me know if you want anything."

At the cabin Ingalls mounted and rode away. Chase began putting his scanty belongings in order. Two blankets sewed together and stuffed with piñon needles made a fragrant mattress on which he spread his blankets. Wisps of cedar he fashioned into a broom with which he swept his floor. Knives and forks were scoured by thrusting in the sand, utensils were washed, frying-pans cleaned. A bundle of wood placed near the fireplace completed his preparations. Then he sat down and contemplated the room with a degree of satisfaction.

The necessities of life are, after all, only the children of our way of looking at things. The more closely we are wedded to the idea of equaling or rivaling others, the more numerous and exasperating the progeny.

Chase grinned at his few possessions and thought of how often he had done with fewer. At the Ingalls's, what a superabundance of dishes! the picture-covered walls! the upholstered chairs! the subdued rugs! All these meant worry and vexation of spirit. With how few things men of his present habits rubbed along, and, as a rule, how care-free they were!

Then came wealth and many other things, and among these, woman.

Was it the things or the woman? One never appeared without the other. What was the matter down at the range house?

He shook his head, rose up, and rode out on the range. It was late that night when the last woolly tail was snapped inside the sheltering corral. Many a time and oft in his life had Chase exhorted fervently over the cussedness of inanimate things, sworn perfervid oaths over the blind stupidity of stampeding herds of cattle; but never before had he felt the utter limitations of language as over his first attempt to corral the infinite perversity of the elastic-bodied, fickle-minded goat.

CHAPTER II

PETER AND BARTHOLOMEW

Two years before the date of this story, Herbert Ingalls had wandered to Dry Creek, and being impressed with its undeveloped possibilities, had bought out the former owner's improvements, said adobe hut and corral, as well as his bunch of Angora goats. With the purchase money in his pockets, the former owner moved on to seek out a new field, as he had done many a time before, and as he was likely to do to the end of his worthless days.

Herbert Ingalls was no tenderfoot in this transaction, in spite of the former owner's statement to the contrary, as he jingled the transferring coins in his pocket, remarking as he did so, that "he had got shut of the worst fool layout he had ever tackled." Ingalls had rightly judged that the land could never be irrigated and so would never be taken up as farm land, and that he could graze his flocks indefinitely without hindrance on the wide range.

Carefully he had tended his bunch of goats, and in his spare time he had improved the land around the adobe, brought water from a distant spring for household use and for the irrigation of a small

garden, uprooted sage and grease-wood, fenced in his oasis, and built additional corrals for his stock. He had also built other corrals to protect his increasing flocks from sneaking coyotes. His ambition was then in sight, and, within a year and a half, his house was as ready as he could make it for the girl in New England who had promised to share his life with him.

He had been East and married her; and now, having returned, he went whistling and singing about his work with no thought of a possible cloudy future before him.

It is true that coming events are always more or less foreshadowed, for plastic minds are moulded by insistent conditions; they never seize conditions and bend them to their own ends. Minatory shadows, cast by mental tendencies, may be dimmed and even obscured to the end of life by the strong light of benign influences; but remove this light, and the black shadows reassert themselves, and the wrecked life gropes around in darkness to a disastrous end.

A pleasure yacht can sweep in safety over the quiet waters of a land-locked bay; only a strong ship can buffet the mighty waves of the open sea.

Both Ingalls and his wife were in reality unfitted for a frontier life, — he, because of a volatile, unbalanced enthusiasm which the first favorable wind strongly impelled in uncharted channels; she, because of a mind too rigid in its ideas of right and wrong to adapt itself readily to new

conditions. The possible sedate and quiet life of a New England town, with its monotonous routine and mild dissipations, repelled them as strongly as the distorted idealisms of color-blind, perspectiveless writers of the West attracted them. The purposeless whoop of careering cowboys, the reckless daring of prospectors, the rattle and clash of boomed and booming towns, all spoke to them of a wild, care-free life where monotony was still-born and thrust into its grave by the unceasing procession of ever-changing scenes.

The frequent letters of her promised husband only made Mary count more restlessly the impatient days that yet separated her from her coming life. The first few weeks in the West had fired her with a painful excitement, akin to that of a child with a superabundance of Christmas toys.

The power of novelty was even yet strong enough to enable her to live down the insuperable annoyances of tactless sandstorms that sifted incisive dust in heavy coats over her household belongings, of the daily procession of cloudless suns, and of the semi-weekly mail that reminded her of the distance from her old friends, incidentally impressing upon her the fact that the greatest charm in novelty after all lies in exciting the mild jealousy of open-eyed friends. As a matter of fact, novelty is a shallow well, but the unavoidable duties of life anywhere and everywhere lay hold upon us with the resistless tug of gravity.

The strongest castle needs constant repair,—

leave it alone, and patient gravity has its way and drags it to earth.

This July morning saw Ingalls on the way to Manzanita, and Mary with sketch-book and box of colors picking her way over her favorite walk along the steep talus that broke the sheer descent of the cliff and eased it to meet the nearly level valley. At the outer edge of a clump of piñons she paused and let her eyes wander down the series of white-fringed pools of Dry Creek, over the silver thread of the Dolores and up to where the Paradox climbed the purple heights of the distant La Sals. The hot, dry air was pleasantly stimulating, conducive rather to the prolonged sweetness of day dreams than to the senseless stupor of sleep.

Mary lazily opened her sketch-book and arranged her paints and brushes. In her was enough of artistic ability to deter her from landscapes as a whole, and to direct her in the selection of detachable units that had a beauty of their own apart from their pretentious settings. Idly turning the leaves of her book and extracting a pardonable amount of comfort from desert flowers and picturesque rocks, she was startled into active consciousness when a black-haired beast, whose fur was powdered white with alkali, dropped with a restful sigh at her feet.

"Bartholomew! Where did you come from? Where's Peter?"

As she lifted her eyes from the dog, they rested

on a little gnome-like man who stood before her. The leathery skin of his face was half hidden behind a tangled maze of thin, grizzled beard, the ears by long locks of hair, and finally shrewd, kindly gray eyes pierced from beneath the shadow of ragged eyebrows. As soon as the little figure perceived that her attention was attracted, he swept a much ventilated hat from his head and, bowing grotesquely, said:—

“Pardon, lady! I hope I do not unforgivably intrude myself?”

“No, indeed,” she replied. “But how you frightened me, Peter! I never met any one here before.”

Peter straightened himself imposingly, his hat hanging in his hand.

“I can believe you, lady. Only those come here who haf the luff of the beautiful. Down there the trail is straight, and no stones in it to make it rough, and down there men luff to walk.” He pointed to the main trail in the valley below, with a gesture half scornful, half pitiful.

Mary did not reply immediately, but sat drawing Bartholomew's ears through her fingers. She had made the acquaintance of Peter and his dog almost the first day of her arrival at Dry Creek. At first Peter had attracted her by his vague mysticisms, much in the same manner as she had been attracted by other novel surroundings of which she considered him an interesting part. But, as her acquaintance with Peter grew, it ripened into

a sincere friendship. Embedded in his rambling figures of speech were many grains of hard common sense that, though at first almost wholly obscured, appealed to her strongly, even after the glamor of novelty had vanished.

As for Peter, in spite of his earnest convictions, he was not invulnerable to flattery; but that it might prove acceptable, it must be genuine, springing from acquiescent appreciation. His acceptance of Mary was cordial, and in her presence he spoke without reserve. He tendered to her the considerate reverence which his chivalrous nature prompted.

"Bartholomew!" Peter exclaimed reproachfully, looking at the recumbent dog. "Why do you trouble the lady? *Komme* here, sir!"

Bartholomew raised his head and looked inquiringly at his master.

"Let him stay here, Peter. He does n't trouble me." Mary spoke without looking up.

Bartholomew, thus reassured, closed his eyes, gave a few hasty sniffs, then, with a long-drawn sigh, replaced his head on Mary's feet.

Peter shook his head reflectively.

"Uff Bartholomew I haf no hope. I haf by my example taught him to gif up all things to do his master's bidding, but with him" — He spread out his hands. "He still gifs up the what is right for the what is pleasant."

Mary looked up, smiling.

"Because a thing is pleasant, it is n't necessarily wrong, is it?"

"No." Peter spoke meditatively. "But it iss here." He raised an emphatic finger. "We luff the pleasant things so much that many times we say it is right because it is pleasant."

Mary shifted to another point.

"Why are n't you at your mine, Peter? You have n't given it up, have you?"

Peter grew rigid.

"Gif up my mine!" he exclaimed. "No, lady. When I gif up my mine, then will I be dead."

"Is it pleasant to work in your mine all alone?"

Peter did not see the trend of Mary's question.

"No, lady, it iss not. Yet I work there all alone, Bartholomew and I."

"But it is pleasant down here, is n't it?" persisted Mary.

"Yes, here it iss pleasant," Peter answered absently, his eyes wandering through the opening trees to the landscape beyond.

Mary's eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Then sometimes you do pleasant things just because they are pleasant."

Peter came to sharp attention.

"Did you ever see a flock of geese driven to market? No?" he asked incisively. "When you look at them, you will say, 'This one goes forward, this one goes backward, this one goes this way and another goes that,' and you say, 'These geese, they all go nowhere.' You haf not looked at the goose-herd. The goose-herd, he knows that go as they will, they go to market."

Mary smiled.

"You have answered a fool according to his folly."

Peter paid no attention to her words, then asked abruptly : —

"What do you in the little book?"

Mary shook her head dubiously.

"Nothing you will care for, Peter," she answered, passing the sketches to him one by one.

Her comments on them, at first invitingly deprecative, became nervously embarrassed, as Peter solemnly absorbed them with half audible grunts instead of the naïve delight she had really expected.

"You don't like them?" she ventured, with a shade of annoyance.

Peter shuffled the leaves compactly and returned them.

"They are good, lady; but they haf nothing, no meaning beyond themselves. Why should I spend my time over pictures of this" — he swept his hand comprehensively around — "when I haf it all, the thing itself? It iss always with me, and always, when I look, it iss something different." He looked at her solemnly, as with absent hand she swept the fragments of an unappreciated sketch from her lap.

"Peter, you make me feel as if I were of no account. I thought these were good. See!"

She held up her last sketch. It was a stunted spruce, from which fierce winds and drifting sand

had swept every trace of verdure, and it stood thrusting out its poor denuded branches, pathetically defiant to the last. Peter looked sorrowful but resolute as he waved the proffered sketch aside.

"Pardon, lady, but you do not understand. Many things in life would please me; but I do not ask this, 'Will it please me?' I ask, 'Does it make my work to grow?'" Peter again paused, looking at his silent listener.

Mary sat thoughtfully turning her discarded sketches.

"Then," she spoke reflectively, "you do not think these are bad?"

"No," interrupted Peter; "only they are nothing to me."

"But," pursued Mary, "I thought you liked paintings."

Peter looked solemn again.

"You do not understand me. The great masters — yes. They did not waste their time on these." Again he swept his hand from Mary's sketches to the surrounding landscape. "The great masters, they studied the souls of men; always the souls of men that look out to the eyes that can see. And always there is something they saw that they could not paint. We feel this that they saw and could not paint; we feel this that they strove for and could not paint; and we look at their work and we feel their longing, and we go away and are better because we are no longer satisfied."

"But, Peter," she began, with a nervous smile, "we were speaking of the right and wrong of pleasant things. I don't mean that it's wrong for you to love the old masters; but — Peter, I don't know. Your geese are all mixed up."

"So?" Peter smiled benevolently. "I will show you. In the mountains it iss lonely and the mine iss dark. And the shadows of the mine eat into my soul so there iss no light. Then I come here where there are sun and stars, and these make the shadows to go away."

Peter's thin voice was resonant. He stood braced, his head thrown back, his hands outstretched. Mary was watching him with parted lips, in her eyes a questioning light. Her eyes dropped. It was not acting. No one could look upon the distant eyes, the ready pose, and question the reality. Mary would never dream of questioning the exaltation bred in monastic cells; she with many others had to learn that long vigils on mountain tops or in solitary deserts can call to life the same absorbed, ecstatic visions.

For a long time he stood, Mary not moving, disliking to break the spell. At length he slowly came back to present consciousness; but he remained silent for a long time.

"You shall see," he resumed finally, "that the light has come. To-morrow I shall go back to the mountains."

The smile faded. He rose and called to Bartholomew.

Mary gathered her materials together and followed his lead to the house. Neither spoke. Mary was thinking many things. As for Peter, the spirit that moved him had departed.

CHAPTER III

THE GATHERING STORM

"HELLO, Peter! Been giving my wife lessons in prospecting?" Ingalls had just returned from Manzanita and was unharnessing his horses, as Mary and Peter entered the corral.

Peter shook his head soberly.

"No," he said; then more brightly, "No. The lady haf no bad habits. I shall teach her none."

"Call prospecting a bad habit, do you? Why, man alive, prospectors, burros, and bacon have made the West! Here's a letter for you, Mary." He turned from Peter to his wife. His face was flushed with excitement.

"What's the matter, Herbert? Did you get a letter, too?"

"Better than that," he exclaimed.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I'll tell you by and by."

Opening her letter she walked slowly towards the house, reading it as she went.

Peter took up the remark addressed to him.

"Yes," he said, meditatively, "prospecting haf made the West what it iss; but," he added, "it might haf been better already if something else haf made it. *Ja*."

"You're an old fraud, Peter. You're the oldest prospector around here, and now you're running down your own business. What's the matter with you? Germania gone back on you?"

"Nefer!" protested Peter vigorously. "I'm no prospector! Did you efer see me drunk? *Nein!*" with a disdainful grunt. "I'm no prospector."

The horses had been turned into the corral and were contentedly munching their barley hay; Bartholomew lay outstretched on the ground. Ingalls seated himself on the wagon tongue, as he said more soberly, —

"Say, Peter, you know my ranch better than I do. Did you ever see any signs of mineral on it?"

"Man, dear, what fool haf put such notions into your head?"

"No fool, Peter. You know Tough Nut?"

"*Ja*, I know Tough Nut. He's a fool already." Then, muttering in his beard, with an emphatic nod of his head, "*ein verdammt* fool."

"You go too infernal fast, Peter. You have n't heard the news."

Peter shook his head impatiently.

"Tough Nut's made the biggest strike in the San Juan, all the same. He's got specimens of the richest ore you ever saw. Showed me the assayer's certificate." Ingalls gathered energy from his memory. "Fifty ounces gold and twenty-five per cent copper," he went on. "It's great! I saw the assayer himself. He says it's straight."

Showed me the button. Old Tice's just throwing the whiskey into Tough Nut, trying to work him for an interest. Oh, he's hit it this time all right. Sure thing!"

"Well, what of it?" Peter demanded almost fiercely. "What of it? If specimens made mines, then would heafen haf to be repaved."

"Don't get wild, Peter! You've no cause to get jealous. If the Royal Flush pans out, you'll have a chance to sell the Germania. There'll be no end of money coming this way, if you only make a go of one mine."

Peter jumped to his feet.

"Sell the Germania!" he shrilled, in his high, excited falsetto. "There's not money enough to buy the Germania! I haf no need of money! When I want it, it iss there!"

"Well, you're not obliged to, if you don't want to. Locoed idiot!" under his breath.

Peter made no audible reply, and Ingalls went on less excitedly, —

"I'll tell you what, Peter, I had a long talk with Tough Nut. I set up the drinks for him at Tice's. He talked sensibly. He told me I need n't go off my own ranch to find a mine. Said the rocks all showed indications of copper; and that copper and gold and silver always traveled together in this country."

Peter interjected a contemptuous snort.

Ingalls, paying no heed to Peter's disapproval, went on: —

"I asked where I could find indications, and he said anywhere. There's bound to be a big lead near by."

Peter held up an emphatic finger.

"Indications! Copper stains! Twenty-five cents' worth of copper will your whole ranch stain! Indications? *Nein!* You will nefer find a mine sticking out of the ground with a veil on its face. Nefer! You haf to make mines, but not out of indications. Nefer!"

Ingalls ignored Peter's remarks, keeping on towards his point.

"You see, I don't know minerals at all. Now, coming back from Manzanita, I thought of you and Chase. You're old hands at the business. We three'll give this place a thorough raking over. I don't want any tramp prospector staking out a claim under my nose and on my own ranch, too."

He paused and rolled a cigarette, expecting Peter to reply. The little German was eyeing him with a half pitying smile.

"Vell?"

Ingalls thrust out his hands in emphatic gesture. An errant breeze caught the half-liberated paper and scattered the tobacco.

"'Vell!'" he repeated impatiently. "Gad, man! It's enough to make a Dutchman's blood run like a white man's." Casting the empty paper aside, he went on, "I'll tell you. If you two fellows will back me up, I'll do the square thing by you." He was interrupted by a call to dinner. "That

means us, Peter. Come in to dinner. We'll talk details after dinner. I have n't been so worked up over anything in a long time."

A grunt from Peter was the only answer, as he followed Ingalls into the house.

At dinner, Mary was rather preoccupied. She was not yet from under the spell which Peter had cast upon her. Ingalls's excited voice only partly roused her.

"I heard great news in Manzanita, Molly! There's been a big strike in the La Sals. Every one's excited. You remember Tough Nut? He's found the biggest mine in the San Juan?"

"Oh," she replied indifferently, "that awful-looking tramp that stayed over night here a few weeks ago?"

"Yes. Only he fooled you. He knows his business all right. His strike is n't more than forty miles from here. Would n't it be great, Molly, if we should strike it rich? We'd go back East in a special car. How'd that suit you?" Ingalls rattled this off, his face flushed with excitement, gaining assurance with every word, like a rolling snowball.

Mary smiled a little uneasily at his enthusiasm.

"Oh, but we have n't found the mine yet."

"Yes, but what if we should?"

Mary laughed, as she replied:—

"It would be awfully upsetting and disagreeable. Besides, we should lose all the pleasure of getting rich. What do you think, Peter?"

Peter laughed grimly.

"You haf right," he said. "But," he shrugged his shoulders ; "he haf the fever, lady. He'll get ofer it. I hope so," he added guardedly.

Ingalls broke in impatiently : —

"No, I have n't got any fever. I tell you this is a new country. There's never been any one here before but cow-punchers. Now Tough Nut's found a big mine. There's bound to be others. In a mineral country, if you find one mine, there's bound to be others. Tough Nut says so. He knows. Why, he's been in every big mining country in the world."

"Ja," Peter grunted. "And he haf made nothing in all of them."

"How about the Royal Flush? You forget that."

"I do not forget the Royal Flush! No; do I not know? Haf I not seen?"

Peter's eyes began to glow, and he was forgetting his dinner. Bartholomew pricked up his ears, then, rising to a sitting posture, he looked with greedy and certain eyes at Peter's waving fork, on which was impaled a tempting piece of meat. He had been in similar experiences before and knew that when once his master became excited, his food was apt to find a more certain destination. Peter spoke excitedly, waving his fork. The meat lost its hold. There was a deliberate snap, and Bartholomew stretched out restfully.

"Ja," continued Peter. "I know Tough Nut.

He's a prospector. Do I not know the prospector?" He paused, with a challenging look, then resumed a little more quietly, almost reminiscently, "When first Bartholomew came to this country, he chased jack rabbits. Oh, yes, he chased jack rabbits. I haf watched him. At first I said to him, 'Bartholomew, don't chase jack rabbits! You can't catch them, and they will make you lots of trouble.' But Bartholomew? He knew more than I; so when he saw a jack rabbit, he chased him. The jack rabbit? Oh, he just hopped and humped and bounded." Peter flapped his arms and shoulders loosely, swaying from side to side. "Then he would stop and look at Bartholomew mournfully. 'It's no use, I'm your meat! Yes, I'm your dog's meat! It's hard; but I'm your dog's meat!' Then would Bartholomew reach out and snap with his jaws. On the jack rabbit? Oh, no! That jack rabbit just kick, just a little, his hind legs and he would be twenty feet away. And so, and so again. Then he would play he was tired, and Bartholomew would say, 'Just a little more and I will haf him!' The jack rabbit was just in front of a big cactus, and he would tremble, he was so tired. And Bartholomew, he would see the jack rabbit and not the cactus, and he would say, 'Now I haf him!' and would run with open jaws, and just as he grabbed, that jack rabbit bounds in the air over the cactus, and Bartholomew grabs with his mouth the cactus and rolls over it with his body and howls with the pain of the

thorns. And the jack rabbit? He does n't stop any more, but goes away and tells all jack rabbits that old Peter haf a damn fool dog that knows no more than to chase jack rabbits."

Peter had warmed to his work. Then, pausing with downcast eyes and shaking head: —

"But Bartholomew learned that he could not catch jack rabbits. Because I tell him so? Oh, no! But because he haf got cactus thorns in his mouth and chaparral in his toes, but no jack rabbit in his belly."

Mary was laughing silently. Ingalls, wriggling uneasily, looked for an opening to break in on Peter's long allegory; but Peter brandished his fork anew.

"*Nein*," he said emphatically. "Bartholomew was a fool, but he haf got ofer it. Prospectors iss *verdammt*e fools, and they nefer gets ofer it!"

Ingalls looked resentful, eyeing Mary askance, but seeing only appreciation of Peter's harangue in her face, the humor of Peter's comparison took hold of him.

"That's all right, Peter," he said, "but for one thing." He laughed. "Prospectors sometimes make a strike, if they stick to it long enough and use a little common sense."

Peter was eyeing his empty fork and looking suspiciously at the studied repose of Bartholomew.

"Yes," he said distantly, "and sometimes a dog catches a jack rabbit."

"Then I don't see the point of your story.

Almost every one makes some kind of a living. It's only once in a while that a man gets rich."

"Yes," answered Peter resignedly, "but nefer chasing jack rabbits. Bartholomew chased jack rabbits till he was too thin to stand, and then he would come home with me and eat himself fat. Then he would chase himself thin again. By and by he said, 'I make myself thin chasing that which I cannot get, and then I come home and grow fat on what I can get. Better that I grow surely a little fat every day than to make myself thin and full of thorns for no more.'"

Mary remained discreetly silent. She was getting new light on the many-sided Peter. With amusement at his humorous comparisons was mingling a strengthening respect. His unexpected figures smote hard, but left no sting. His words bristled with hard common sense. Even though she knew practically nothing of what was being discussed, she could see the wisdom that the ages have proved true. Peter was visionary, yes; but her estimate of him must be adjusted on new lines.

There was a lull. Ingalls had little to say and Peter was making up for lost time on his dinner.

Mary was first to break the silence.

"I think," she said, "Peter and Bartholomew are right. But," she went on, turning to Peter, "the West is n't the only place where people can chase jack rabbits."

"No, lady; that iss so. But when a hunter

sees too much game, he gets none." Peter applied himself earnestly to his dinner.

"Oh, come, Peter!" broke in Ingalls, laughing. "You're like a cuttlefish that hides himself in his own ink. You talk in riddles; guess this."

Peter grimaced over a hasty swallow of hot coffee.

"Ja," he coughed. "An ostrich sticks his head in the sand and says, 'Where am I?'"

"Oh, confound you! There you go again! Now just listen and answer straight. I want to know what chance there is of finding a mine here. I happened to mention Tough Nut, and instead of answering me, you said Tough Nut was a prospector, and prospectors were a pack of dogs chasing jack rabbits."

Peter's plate was all but cleared. He looked at it ruefully for a moment; but the challenge was too much. His voice rose and his fork waved.

Bartholomew, noting the voice, opened one eye inquiringly, but the fork was free of encumbrances and his eye closed.

"Bartholomew, sir!"

Bartholomew lazily raised himself to attention.

"Shall I tell them some more of your dog fool tricks? Shall I tell them how many kinds of dog fool you haf shed in this country?"

Bartholomew hung his head in deprecating shame.

"*So ist es.* Bartholomew did not catch the jack rabbit. Then he said, 'The ground hog iss

better. Then he chase the ground hog, and the ground hog haf not to run, but he haf the hole, and when he sees Bartholomew he makes himself *darin*. Then Bartholomew, he says 'Woof!' and goes at that hole, and he digs with both feet and he smells with his nose, and the dirt flies. Then he stops and thrusts with his nose and sniffs and sniffs! Then with four feet the dirt flies! He makes his nose full of dust and his eyes full of sand. Then he rests and smells again. Then he takes with one paw and scratches, so." Here Peter made a slow, dragging motion with his hand. "And he turns his head and looks with one eye in that hole; and then he lies down and looks in that hole. 'That hole iss deeper than I thought. The dirt iss harder and there iss much dust. I did not look at that ground hog well, but I belief he haf not much of fat.' And his eyes make together. Then he sees another ground hog that iss better and fatter, and this ground hog goes into a hole that iss not so deep and the dirt iss not so hard. Then again flies the dirt and much sniffing." Peter looked up inquiringly at Ingalls. There was no response and he went on, "So Bartholomew digs ground hogs no more. He haf learned that he gets more meat and better than ground hog by doing his master's bidding." Again he looked up at Ingalls inquiringly.

"And what of it?" asked Ingalls teasingly.

Peter thrust out his half-raised hands as he shook his head despairingly.

“What of it? Thiss! Many men dig for ground hogs. They make the dirt to fly. Then comes another man along and says, ‘That ground hog iss no good. They are lean and mangy in this country. *Komm mit* me. I will take you where the ground hogs are fat, where the holes are not deep and the dirt iss not hard.’ And he goes and digs for ground hogs all hiss life and nefer gets one. But some men they dig. They say, ‘Fat or lean, slick or mangy, hard dirt or soft, I am going to have this ground hog,’ and they get him. It may not be much, but they get him.”

Ingalls rose from the table laughing.

“I’ll tell you one thing, Molly. Peter’ll have to quit digging out ground hogs, or we’ll be ready for breakfast before we leave the table. Besides, I’ve got to get Chase’s traps over to him. Come on, Peter, here’s a ground-hog case for you. I want you to help me pack the burros.”

When the last pack was fastened, Ingalls mounted his horse and headed his train for the cabin; he turned with a parting shot:—

“You go tell my wife some more yarns; she likes them.”

“*Ja*,” returned Peter, “but she haf no need of them.”

CHAPTER IV

THE PROFFERED SHELTER

As Ingalls rode away toward the herder's cabin, an amused smile flitted over his face, while he recalled Peter's quaint parables.

"Confound that fellow!" he muttered. "He's pretty smooth, after all. I'll feel of Chase a little, anyway."

Chase was not at the cabin, and Ingalls dismounted and began carrying the various parcels within, peering around, as he noted with surprise the orderly arrangement of the scanty furniture that really made the earth floor and bare walls attractive. Every utensil was bright and clean and in its place. The fire was laid and the coming meal foreshadowed in freshening bacon and cans of food with the opener by their side. Even the coffee-pot was filled, and the coffee-mill had its allowance of coffee ready to grind. Evidently Chase could have prepared his meal in the dark, but there was a candle stuck in a bottle with a box of matches beside it. Ingalls was pleasantly complacent. His flocks were perfectly safe with such prevision.

Ingalls tried to distribute the packages he had brought in harmony with their predecessors. This

done, he walked to the door. Chase was nowhere in sight. The sun was already setting, and gorgeous shadows were marching grandly up the cañon.

The corrals were invisible around a projecting buttress. Ingalls mounted and rode leisurely toward them. As he approached the brow of the upper terrace, out on the level bench below, a rigid neck and steadfast head, ornamented with a pendant beard, was shot into sight by spurning legs that alternately humped a woolly back into arching curves, and straightened it into tangents. Behind the fleeing goat rode Chase, with one hand gathering a rope into even coils, the other steady-ing his plunging broncho. The rope flew through the air, and the loop hovered for a moment, then settled on the horns of the fleeing goat. The pony saw the settling coil, and, thrusting forward his fore feet as a pivot, swung his hind quarters under the saddle. He had helped to rope cattle, and knew how and when to take a hand. Chase was wiser, and, as the horse stopped, he paid out the rope, just keeping it taut. The roped goat plunged and bounded like a tailless kite. Chase rode slowly toward him, gathering in the slack. But the goat was at bay. Viciously eyeing the approaching horse, he bunched his feet, and, with lowered head, charged straight for his captors. The pony was wise in the ways of beasts. As the goat sprang into the air to give full force to the expected blow, the pony lightly swerved to one

side, and the plunging goat, scraping and kicking in a cloud of dust, rose to his feet and shook his head in hircine bewilderment.

The phlegmatic horse, trusting in his rider, strode toward the corral, unmindful of the plunging goat bounding at the end of the rope. Chase, thinking not of possible mutiny in the rear, had rolled and lighted a cigarette. As he blew forth a soothing whiff, he looked towards the corral in time to see a grizzled leader beat attention with rigid feet and then launch himself in the air. Over the inclosing wall he went, followed by a woolly rope frayed by projecting horns, as in rapid succession his subjects followed his lead, then, bunching for a moment, fanned out in the growing shadows.

Ingalls, laughing till he reeled, spurred forward his horse. Pausing to open the gate of the corral, just as Chase rode up with the trailing goat, they threw the recreant beast into a pen and rode after the fleeing herd. The twilight had deepened into dusk before the wandering herd, having demonstrated satisfactorily the innate cussedness of hircine impulses, meekly entered the corral. There they lay quietly down, as with distant eyes they contemplated the fallibility of men in the presence of the errant beast.

Chase lifted the sombrero from his head and drew the back of his hand across his brow.

"The Synoptics made a bad break," he said emphatically. "'T was a herd of goats, instead of swine, that the devils entered into. And," he

continued, as he viciously kicked at a sniffing nose, "these beasts have handed down their devils from father to son." With twinkling eyes he looked at Ingalls, as he sifted some tobacco into a paper.

Ingalls nodded a grinning assent.

"Yes," Chase added. "These devils find more active coöperation inside a goat skin than in the lowest corner of hell."

"What about Colorado?" queried Ingalls.

"Tight leg and pull up," grunted Chase, as a flaring match lighted up his face. "That's a slick game you played on me," he continued. "You did n't include cuss-words in supplies, did you?"

"Did n't think you needed them. I'm sure of it now. You had a good head on to-night."

Chase grinned and swung into his saddle.

"You'd better come to the cabin and eat with me. Your wife won't keep supper for you this late."

"Guess I will. I wanted to have a talk with you, anyway."

"Want your job back?" Chase flashed a sarcastic smile at Ingalls.

"Oh, no!" said Ingalls hastily. "You're doing well. Could n't do better myself."

"If it was n't for a firm belief in transmigration of devils, as well as of souls, I'd send those two whiskered patriarchs to goat-hell a-flying." Chase spoke grimly and from an overflowing heart.

They reached the cabin. Chase unsaddled and turned his horse into the corral.

"Put your horse out?"

"No, I'll come in and talk with you awhile, then I'll have to get back. Peter is over at the ranch, so there's no hurry."

"Level-headed old bird, that Peter!" Chase was deliberately busy getting supper. "He's got a whole bunch of hard, common sense, if he does put a lot of bread around his pie."

"Yes," assented Ingalls, absently. He was a little uneasy. Chase's decided motions, the boring look of his eyes, made him feel as if he were a bad man before whom to make a break. If he should make a fool of himself, Chase would know it, and it would be disconcerting. The emotional and the judicial were striving within him. He jerked himself together, not with decision, but with bravado.

"Heard the news?" he asked briskly.

"No; have your eggs turned?" Chase looked at Ingalls.

"Yes."

There was a quick flirt, and the turned eggs sizzled protestingly.

Ingalls went on rather desperately:—

"Well, they've made a big strike in the La Sals. That's straight! I saw the ore."

"Got a touch of the fever?" A grin showed again under Chase's bristling mustache.

"Confound you! no," laughed Ingalls. "That's what Peter said."

"Should n't wonder. I've known Peter a long time. Mining fever is common. Good deal like measles : not especially dangerous, unless it strikes in."

"Then what?"

"Sure death." Chase spoke flippantly, but there was unmistakable decision.

Ingalls shifted uneasily.

"Well, I saw Tough Nut. He was at Tice's, when I went for your traps. Tice was excited. You know Tice. He would n't take chances on a sunrise, but he was just loading Tough Nut."

"Tough Nut?" Chase paused and looked at Ingalls. "Is that damned Irishman around Tice's?"

Ingalls laughed.

"Transmigration is getting in its work on you. That's Peter again."

"That's a fact. Transmigration? Common sense! Just the same thing in a man or wrapped up in a dog skin. Look at Bartholomew. Pull up!" he continued, seating himself at the table.

Ingalls turned his chair.

"Help yourself. This chuck is n't as good as your wife's, if it is cooked the same way."

"Well, when you get tired of it, come over, and we'll see what we can do."

"Guess I'll have to get these goats into better shape, before I go into ladies' society much," laughed Chase. "Goat antics are not conducive to refined thought or expression either."

"Well, honest, Chase, Tough Nut got me a little worked up. Not on mining in general, — I'm not fool enough for that, — but he told me that I need n't go off my own ranch to prospect."

"That's so," assented Chase dryly. "Tough Nut's dead right there. You've got just as good a chance, and it's a hell of a lot more convenient."

Ingalls looked up, pleasantly expectant.

"Is that so? Have you seen indications, too? Tough Nut said there were no end of indications right around Dry Creek."

"Yes," answered Chase, "it's got beyond indications, though. This is sure the best goat range in Colorado. I've stumped around in this man's country for years, walked right over what you hit on first thing."

"Oh, damn!" broke in Ingalls. "Goat ranging don't amount to anything. Just an existence, that's all, and a slow one, too. I want to make a strike." He gave Chase an inquiring look, but Chase made no reply. "I told Peter I did n't know straight up about minerals, but that I got to thinking, as I came back from Manzanita, that we three could make a pretty strong team. What do you say? You and Peter help me out. We can rake this place over pretty thoroughly. You see the ranch will feed us, and we'll break even on what we find."

Chase pulled out a pouch of tobacco and filled his pipe.

"Load up?" He held up the tobacco and In-

galls reached for it. "Symptoms are developing all right. Big strike, indications, grub-staking. You 're developing a beautiful case, as the doctors say." He stretched out comfortably and indulged in a reminiscent chuckle.

Ingalls looked nettled.

"Grub-staking?"

"Yes. One fellow puts up the money, the other worthless experience. That keeps more men broke than a Wall Street bucket-shop."

"I don't want to break any one, and I don't intend to get broke, either." Ingalls hardly tried to hide a slight annoyance. "It looked to me like a straight proposition."

"Oh, the proposition! That's straight enough. That was n't what I was thinking of."

"Well, what were you thinking of?" asked Ingalls uneasily, — "if it's a fair question."

Chase pulled meditatively at his pipe.

"Are you really in earnest, Ingalls?" He turned deliberately and leveled his eyes at Ingalls.

"Of course I'm in earnest," Ingalls answered a little sullenly.

Chase ignored the manner, but not the words.

"Oh, well, mining fever's not bad to have and get over. Every one has it. It's a kind of Aleppo mark. Shows you have been in Bagdad and knew too much to stay there."

He turned smilingly to Ingalls. There was an earnestness even in his smile. Ingalls was somewhat pacified.

"Well, what do you say to the proposition? I'm not dead struck on mining, as I told you; only I don't want to overlook any bets."

"Of course not; but that is n't it. Why, yes, if you want to look over the ranch, of course I'll help you. But," Chase leveled his eyes at Ingalls again, "it's dangerous business."

"Looking over the ranch?" asked Ingalls lightly.

Chase went on:—

"It's demoralizing, damned demoralizing! I've seen strong men go to pieces over it. It takes hold of you like quicksand. Your feet stick just a little at first, and then, before you know it, you're in up to your neck and can't get out."

"Oh, come, Chase, you're making a mountain out of a molehill. I'm not going loco over this thing."

"That's what they all say. I don't want to preach, Ingalls; but I'm telling you the truth. It's demoralizing. It makes plain, every-day life seem as insipid and petty as a case of chicken-stealing to a corporation lawyer. Why should n't it? You never saw a prospector that felt poor, even if he had only a pair of legless trousers pinned on with a cactus thorn. He's living in future wealth so big that he sniffs at ten dollars a day. You see he can't make ten dollars a day look bigger than thirty-six hundred a year! But there's no strings on a hole in the ground."

"Oh, well," Ingalls broke in impatiently, "I

don't see what I have to do with prospectors. I tell you I'm not a prospector and have no intentions of being one. I make a plain proposition to you and Peter, and you lecture me on generalities."

Chase looked a little thoughtful. He had gauged Ingalls. Ingalls could be led, but driving was out of the question. He felt a strong attraction towards him, an attraction that impelled him to put his years of experience at a disposal where he felt that it would be helpful. There was no thought or feeling of patronage. He saw clearly that whatever influenced Ingalls must come in such a manner that Ingalls could put it forth as coming from within, not from without. Ingalls was vain with the vanity, not of conscious strength, but of conscious weakness that strives to hide itself behind the veil of quick and persistent decision. Weakness and obstinacy often go hand in hand.

Chase turned slightly in his chair.

"I think, Ingalls, that neither Peter nor I have been talking generalities as much as may appear. We are old hands out here in a way, and know pretty well what we are saying. Our experience has taught us this, that in mining, as a rule, fortunes don't come by a sudden chance strike, as they say, but with the expenditure of much careful thought, time, and money. This is the rule, but there are unfortunate exceptions. Mines are not found; they are made."

"There goes Peter," broke in Ingalls, laughing.

"You fellows are as alike as two nips from the same jug. But why do you say unfortunate exceptions? It seems to me anything but unfortunate."

Chase smiled quizzically.

"Did you ever see a dog that had dug a field-mouse out of a hole? If you have, you have never seen that dog go by that place again, without taking another sniff and dig at it. He'll go a mile out of his way for it any time. You see I am quoting Peter."

Ingalls made a gesture of mock despair.

"Well, what of it? It does n't hurt the dog."

"That's just where a man is n't like a dog. It hurts a man."

"Confound it, Chase! I feel as dizzy as a whirling dervish in a merry-go-round."

"Well, a merry-go-round is n't a circumstance to a mining craze." Chase rose and stood with his back to the fireplace. "I'll tell you, Ingalls; I don't want to advise any man what to do, much less you. All I've said amounts to this: I've taken fliers in prospecting; I'm out of it for keeps. I'm herding goats for forty and chuck. Goats are hell, but they are sweet fields beyond the swelling flood compared to that life."

Ingalls made a desperate jab with his fork. He was impatient with fencing. Unless he were running a straight course, he could not see that he was making progress.

"Will you give me some pointers on the ranch?"

"Sure thing."

"All right. I'm in dead earnest about this. I give you my word. We'll break even on what we find."

He rose as he spoke, glancing at his watch. Chase followed him to the door and out.

Ingalls said nothing, but busied himself about the bridle. Chase, according to habit, was unconsciously looking over the cinches. As Chase stepped aside, Ingalls jumped into the saddle. He was conscious of a feeling of resentment against Chase. He was not certain how far he had succeeded in concealing it. His personal vanity fostered resentment; his really generous nature fought heartily against it. His actions were consequently wavering and undecided.

He half turned, resting one hand on his horse. His winning side was strongly surgent.

"I'm not quite as stupid as I may have seemed from the way I talked, Chase. I think I understand you perfectly. Really, I'm much obliged to you." He looked into Chase's eyes frankly and steadily. "I put you in a nasty position."

"Oh, don't say any more," answered Chase. "It's all right." Ingalls's winning frankness had disarmed him for the moment.

"Well, good-night! It's getting late." He turned and started away a few steps, then stopped. "Oh, Chase! I nearly forgot a message for you from my wife. Peter's invited us to inspect the Germania, and she told me to be sure to ask you to go with us. I'm indorsing the invitation

as well as transmitting it. You'll come, won't you?"

"Sure, if I can get away long enough to get my vocabulary in shape. Thank Mrs. Ingalls for me. When are you going?"

"Don't know for certain; week or so. You can thank her yourself. Come over to dinner tomorrow, and we'll finish arrangements. I'll get a man for the day, when we go. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

Chase stood in the shadow of the cabin, watching Ingalls as he rode away through the white moonlight. He was conscious of a disquieting feeling. He saw painfully clear the obstinate vanity of the man, that feared nothing so much as the shame of admitting himself in the wrong; the vanity that would remorselessly sacrifice its victim and his dearest friends rather than bend one jot its selfish pride; the vanity that would make him an easy prey to unprincipled men, who would flatter and delude till their ends were gained, when they would cast their victim, a frantic wreck, in the dust of their unmasked ridicule. How clearly it all showed! Chase knew well what Ingalls never dreamed. This evening Ingalls had sought for approbation, not suggestions or advice.

Then the other Ingalls! The frank, cordial, impulsive generosity that drew you to him in spite of yourself! Chase had seen such men before in his Western life; but hitherto they had not touched him. They had only been impersonal incidents.

He turned and reëntered the cabin, but he could not shake off the feeling of depression. It was not alone of Ingalls that he was thinking, for Ingalls was not alone.

CHAPTER V

LITTLE LONE CONE

It would be difficult to judge whether Peter or Mary looked forward with the greater pleasure to the promised visit to the Germania. Mingled with her desire to spend a day in the mountains was an abiding curiosity to see the mine of which she had heard so much from others as well as from Peter.

As for Peter, he was by no means wholly free from the weakness of vanity and the charms of judicious flattery. But Peter tempered his weakness with strength. Only those for whom he had a genuine respect as well as a feeling of friendship had the power to kindle the one and make acceptable the other.

The day for the proposed visit had arrived, and all necessary arrangements had been made. Before sunrise, Ingalls and Mary were riding rapidly down to the arroyo which, leading from the herder's cabin, crossed their trail at a convenient point for Chase. Peter had refused Ingalls's offer of a horse, evidently to the relief of Bartholomew, who for years had adapted himself to his master's steady jog, and infinitely preferred it to the broken pace of the horseman, which could but disturb the serenity of his even-paced meditations.

Mary was full of animation. Under the clear olive skin, the changing color paled and glowed with the gliding movements of the restless panorama of mountain and plain and rising sun.

"Good-morning, Mr. Chase," she called, as Chase came in sight, riding down the arroyo. "Is n't this a perfect day for our outing?"

"Perfect," he replied, returning her greeting. "But I see you don't yet count certainly on our Colorado weather."

"No," — with a backward look towards Chase, who, after hailing Ingalls, reined in his horse for Mary to pass, — "no. New England habits are still strong upon me."

"Don't drop them. It would be better for this country if New England habits were generally more permanent."

"You speak in riddles." She half turned, with a questioning smile.

"Do I? Well, you see, it's force of habit. If you don't know what to say, speak mysteriously. It keeps you from feeling embarrassingly conspicuous."

"You're an admirable exponent of your own philosophy. It has n't occurred to me to try to differentiate you from your words. It has n't seemed necessary."

"Don't try to, please. I'm apprehensive of results."

"Do you distrust my fairness?"

"No. I'm afraid of it."

"Distrust is the parent of fear. You're trying to hide an unpleasant truth under a compliment."

"Wide are the ways of words!" That was n't my meaning at all. We both are tinged with egotism. At least, I was thinking of myself."

Mary laughed lightly.

"I believe you are conceited," she said. "I know you are n't stupid."

"Shall we call it a draw?" laughed Chase. "I know you want the last word, and I'll give it to you."

"Your generosity is assumed. I'll help myself to my prerogatives. You have enough of your own with which to be generous."

Ingalls was an impatient listener. He had plans of his own, and he was eager to get them under way. He had counted on riding with Mary to the arroyo. There he was to leave her with Chase while he rode on, intercepting Peter, who was following a shorter trail and one more difficult for horsemen. Mary and Chase were to take the longer and safer trail to their rendezvous.

"With your permission, I'll leave Mrs. Ingalls in your care," Ingalls said, addressing Chase. "Peter and I'll meet you at the foot of the mountain."

"Certainly," replied Chase; "but" — He looked inquiringly at Mary.

"Oh," broke in Ingalls, "I have her consent already." He raised his hat and rode away across the mesa to the broken ground where Peter was picking his laborious way.

Chase let his eyes rest for a moment upon the animated, graceful figure that sat her pony so easily. Her light sombrero, with its half-military roll, threw her flushed face and luminous eyes in strong relief against the shadow of the drooping brim. One gray-gauntleted hand held the reins with nervous fingers; the other flicked with her quirt at passing sage and cactus.

Her eyes were wandering over the broad mesa. Really, there is much, even in a desert, if one has eyes to see. In the distance, occasional herds of antelope galloped by, their dun-colored coats making them all but invisible against the dun background. From behind a mass of jumbled rock, a grizzled ground hog stared at them with solemn eyes, then, disappearing for a moment, returned with his entire family, that they too might see the invaders of their solitude. Through villages of prairie-dogs they went; on each mound a rigid, yellow figure sat upright with a daring "Who's afraid?" inspired by the courage of their immediate burrows. But their courage ended precipitately with the approach of the riders. Their stubby tails vibrated defiance as they plunged from sight, then, turning abruptly, they thrust forth wrinkling noses that sniffed apprehensive danger. Under their feet ugly, horned toads wriggled out of sight in the hot sands, while an occasional humble bee droned a monotonous complaint as he flew from plant to shrub in search of belated flowers.

Mary turned to Chase with a questioning look.

"Too much sunshine is bad, is n't it?"

"Literally or figuratively?" he asked.

"Both," she replied.

"That's very comprehensive," he answered.

"You see that, even supposing I had anything interesting to say, I might talk a long time and then not answer what you have especially in mind."

"I really don't know what I did have," — she was looking absently around, — "unless it was this: when I first came out here, I was wildly attracted by everything. It was so new and strange to me, I could n't put things in order. I can't now, for that matter." She glanced quickly at him with a shadowy smile.

Chase made no reply.

She resumed somewhat desperately: —

"Well, it's something like this. In New England there was sunshine and rain, and summer and winter. Everything seemed to be working in harmony. Things seemed to understand each other, some way." She looked up appealingly.

"You're doing well. Go on."

"If you insist." She spoke with slight impatience. "Out here it's different. Here's the eternal hot sun, and things go on in spite of it. That's just it, in spite of it, and you are conscious all the time of the 'in spite of it.' Some way, it is n't comfortable. I feel dreadfully apprehensive at times." She shivered slightly.

Chase answered : —

“ Oh, that is n't strange, really. Is n't it like this? When you first came here the novelty attracted you, as you say. You did n't ask yourself uncomfortable questions. If you had been a visitor you would have gone away and carried only pleasant remembrances with you. Now you are realizing that these things are to be a part of your every-day life, and that you must shape your life accordingly. You see, they are going to cease to be novelties, are going to become familiars. Your apprehension appears to me to be very natural.”

She laughed rather soberly.

“ I fancy that's it. But then, whether it's natural or not, it is, and it's uncomfortable. I can't help wondering whether I shall find the men and women so uncannily influenced.”

“ I don't imagine men and women are especially different here from what they are in New England. Life is not veiled out here. That's the principal difference. You see natural forces struggling in the strong glare of sunlight, and the people who live here are no exceptions.”

“ Then what is the effect on them? You see I want to know what to expect.”

“ There's no legitimate room for expectation. At least, there ought n't to be. A man has things in his own hands here as anywhere. Just decide in your own mind what of your new surroundings you will allow to influence you, and what you will not; then you can make of yourself what you will.”

"But that means you must have a settled purpose," she objected.

"Of course. You would drift otherwise. Drifting is always dangerous."

She smiled a little impatiently.

"That's what I'm doing now. There seem to me to be more wrecked lives out here than — well, in my old home, for instance."

She reined in her horse. "Tell me, Mr. Chase, do you think personal influence counts for much?"

Chase looked thoughtful.

"I'm afraid I can't answer that in a word. More than three quarters of the people you see here are living without any thought save for themselves."

Mary was thinking of her own husband; so was Chase. He was painfully aware that he had avoided answering her as she wanted to be answered. They were again moving along the trail.

"Are n't you taking your pleasures rather seriously? I thought this was to be a pleasure trip. Here's our last chance for a dash."

They rode up the steep slope of the last bench, and a long, gentle rise to the foot of the mountain lay before them. The horses started off in a smart gallop. They passed across the remaining desert, and entered a grassy zone just below the timber, where the late melting snow seeped through the generous soil, quickening into life a rank vegetation. Here and there an icy rill trickled over moist, moss-covered stones fringed with purple

monkshood and larkspur, or ran hidden from sight by a tangle of willows. Further up, steep-sloped ridges gleamed with the ghostly trunks of quaking asps that held, with clumsy fingers, their crown of restless leaves. The cool, soft, shadowy light was grateful after the fierce beat of the glaring sun. Still higher, and the quaking asps gave way to the thick growths of fragrant spruce and balsam. Trilling birds darted from tree to tree. Saucy squirrels, chattering in pretended terror, skittered up the trunks, and, shrilling and scolding on secure branches, dropped impertinent cones upon the riders, then turning, climbed still higher, or leaped from branch to branch with restless energy. Still up reached the trail. It was getting steeper and the air thinner. Out again into the open sunshine. It was no longer hot and fiercely oppressive. The thick groves had disappeared. In their places were stunted, straggling trees that held out defiant branches, denuded of verdure, or squatted and crawled in dense, impenetrable mats upon the surface. Strange, sweet-scented gentians lifted their fringed cups to the grateful air. Still others, with unassuming modesty, grew close to the ground, shutting tight their tiny blossoms at the slightest touch. Clusters of columbine lifted their creamy blue blossoms, sharp and clear in the exhilarating air, while here and there patches of mossy phlox hid the bare, brown rocks in an aureole of color. They paused to give their horses breath.

Mary drank in silently the restful beauty of the scene. Below, the wooded slopes swept down a graceful curve to meet the level mesa. Above, sharp angles and vertical lines piled and thrust the ragged rocks against the deep sky. She swept an errant lock of hair beneath her hat as she turned to Chase.

"I never dreamed of anything so grandly beautiful! It's almost painful in its intensity. I don't know whether to laugh or to cry. I feel like doing both." There was a slight quaver in her voice.

"Great! is n't it, Mary?" Ingalls shot up from behind a broken mass of rock, followed by a comprehensive smile tangled in a straggling beard.

"Iss not this worth the struggle for? Thiss! Below, the hot sand and the thorns; here, the beauty, the calm above it all!"

"Why, Peter! And you have been telling me of the frightful storms and tempests. Are n't you a little forgetful?"

"No, lady; you are forgetful. Iss it not so? I tell you often of storms. Yes. But I tell you the storms are of the mountains, and the mountains conquer the storms, and the calm of the rest comes." There was evidently a struggle within; but Peter thrust the opportunity aside. "I haf the pleasure, lady, to ask you to eat. You must be hungry."

After lunch all the horses were tethered except Mary's. Ingalls walked ahead; Peter insisted

upon leading the horse which Mary rode. Chase brought up the rear. The rough trail zigzagged up the faces of almost vertical cliffs, and stretched away across steep slide rock that reached hundreds of feet above and below. Ingalls cheerfully assured Mary that there was no danger; Peter kept up a panting chatter, while Chase swung along behind, silent but watchful. A slip meant an ugly, if not a disastrous fall. But the pony had his own bones to look out for. He had had falls before, and was properly cautious and sure-footed.

At the spot where the trail left the slide, Peter halted and pointed to a great gash that cleft the mountain to the summit.

"There, lady, iss the Germania vein!" He paused, looking radiantly expectant.

"What an undertaking for one man!"

"In thiss I am not alone." Peter was growing solemn. "But come, I will show you."

They resumed their climb, and finally halted under the shade of a great cliff. From its side a rude plank runway reached out, then disappeared in the dark mouth of the tunnel.

"Here we are. You haf the honor." Peter waved to Ingalls as he stepped aside.

Ingalls laughingly assisted Mary to dismount. Peter was bustling about the entrance of his tunnel, preparing candles, and noisily picking up and putting to one side a few fragments of rock that littered the floor.

"Will the lady do me the honor to inspect my

work?" He offered her a lighted candle, which she accepted, and they entered the tunnel. Ingalls was already well inside, inspecting with critical eye the vein on which Peter was driving. The tunnel reeked with the odor of stale powder smoke; the flickering lights cast uncanny shadows on dun rocks and dense blackness, while voice and footfall awakened muffled echoes.

Peter occasionally held his candle at Mary's feet to guide her steps, then, forgetful of his self-imposed task, flourished it aloft, as he discoursed on leaders and feeders, cross-faults, and the thousand and one subterfuges to which nature resorts to hide her treasures from plundering man. The significance of gouge, of softening rock, in foreshadowing the near approach to the main vein, these were enlarged upon by Peter in a high falsetto that cracked and rattled a sharp contrast to the hollow, rumbling echoes.

They neared the breast of the tunnel, and Peter thrust the spur of his candlestick into a crevice and pried out a bit of loosened quartz.

"See, lady, thiss iss quartz! The real vein quartz! How do I know?" He raised his candle with a side poise of his head. "Ah! Haf I not studied? Haf I not pondered? The big Germania vein! I am not far from it! Soon I shall cut it. Then!" He spread his wide arms and lifted his deep eyes to the roof of the tunnel.

Peter's soul was delighted with Mary's expressions of unfeigned astonishment. They retraced

their steps to the open air. Mary glanced upward, where a hazardous trail led up the sides of the cliff.

"Now for the Germania itself!"

"It iss a hard climb, lady, and dangerous. I would not try it."

"Mary's pretty steady-headed, Peter. She'll make it all right, if she wants to go." Ingalls looked at her smilingly.

They climbed the face of the cliff, then descended to the loose slide that filled the cleft. Keeping close to the cliff, they slowly climbed to the summit. As they neared the crest, peak after peak lifted itself above the line of rocks, and at the very crest, on either hand and in front, an unbroken sea of scarred and isolated peaks reached up in solemn, terrifying grandeur. Great clefts tore through them to their summits, and far below, the loosened rocks fanned out into great slides. Minatory rocks perched insecurely on lofty pinnacles seemed to wait but the slightest touch to send them hurtling into the awful chasm below.

Chase was watching Mary with anxious solicitude. Ingalls and Peter were far below them. Peter, surprised and delighted at his unexpected interest, was pointing out chunks of float that had become detached from the main vein and were mingled with the broken rocks of the slide.

"Have a care, Mrs. Ingalls! It's more dangerous than you think. Don't go any further." Chase reached out a detaining hand.

Mary had forgotten her surroundings in the wild

grandeur of the scene before her; she did not notice the outstretched hand, hardly the warning voice. One step more, and nothing would break her vision. Chase was a fateful second too late. She stepped upon a large rock, swayed for a second, unconscious that the rock was tottering, thinking it was herself. There was a slow grinding sound; the rock slipped from under her feet and went bounding and crashing a thousand feet below.

She fell prone on her face, clutching wildly at slippery rocks. Down! Down! Slowly, but surely, and she could not stop. A blanched face with terror-stricken eyes looked up appealingly to Chase. Her lips were drawn, but tightly closed. Her clutching fingers slipped and slipped. Down! Down! She closed her eyes, waiting for the final plunge. There was a tug at her arm. She was conscious that her fall was checked. How long? She looked slowly upward. A tiny point of rock had caught the gauntlet of her glove.

"Don't move! Stay perfectly quiet!" Chase was cutting the laces of his boots. Then, lying flat, he began to let himself down. "Ingalls!" he called. He took his hunting knife from its sheath and blunted its edge on the rocks, then thrust it through the sleeve of his coat. His heart was beating wildly, but his voice was reassuring, almost jesting. "It's slow traveling, but I'll be with you in a minute."

Mary closed her eyes again. "I'll be with you; I'll be with you," droned through her mind, still-

ing the throbbing fear of death. Just below her feet, a narrow shelf of rock hung over the precipice. It was not encouraging, but it was the only chance. The slightest error meant death to both. Chase felt of every rock, testing it, and slowly crept from point to point. Not a pebble was dislodged. His ears were strained to catch the slightest indication that Mary was losing her hold. A projecting rock gave him a firmer support. Carefully balancing, he stretched one foot down to the narrow shelf, cautiously tried it ; then gently, little by little, trusted his whole weight to it. The knife-blade was thrust into a crevice, and he held part of his weight by this.

"Don't move till I tell you. Keep perfectly quiet."

He glanced upward. The frightened faces of Ingalls and Peter were peering over the edge. Peter held up his long staff inquiringly. Chase nodded.

"Here, take this ! Reach down to the lady. So ! By the heels will I hold you. *Gott im himmel !* So !" Peter grasped Ingalls firmly as he bent forward, reaching down the staff.

"Look out for loose rock !" Chase's voice was even.

The staff touched her hand.

"Catch it, for God's sake ! Hurry !" Ingalls spoke entreatingly, but Mary never moved. Chase, slightly stooping, took one of her feet in his hands. As he did so, a light film of dust floated lazily up-

ward. He knew what it meant. The shelf of rock on which he rested, was giving way. The perspiration broke out in beads on his forehead.

"Now!" he said.

Mary grasped the staff. He guided her other foot to another crevice. A little pebble rattled down; the dust films floated up thicker. The rock on which he stood was trembling. He grasped the blade more firmly.

"Steady, Ingalls! Steady! Now brace with your feet."

Peter reached down and seized her hand. The next moment, she was lifted up in safety. There was a grinding crash, then a muffled roar, and a blinding cloud of dust swirled upward. The watching faces were tense in awful fear, as they strove to pierce the cloud with straining eyes.

"Don't worry; I'm all right." The voice was exultant.

As the dust cleared away, they saw Chase looking downward for an instant. Then he lowered himself to the ledge below. It was firm. He moved along it, pressed close to the rock, then passed from sight.

"I'm all right now. I'm on country rock. That's a piece of your old Germania I kicked off, Peter."

They could hear the knife scratching on the rocks, and floating films of dust told Peter what was going on.

"Can I help you?" Peter's voice was anxious.

"No; only don't kick down any more of the Germania."

It seemed an age, but it was only seconds. A pair of imperturbable eyes showed over the sloping brow of the cliff, and the next instant Chase stood among them. Mary held out her trembling hands. Chase took them in his own firm grasp.

"You have a steady head. That was magnificent. I hope it has n't spoiled your day." He turned and picked up his boots.

Mary laughed in spite of herself. Chase was in his stocking feet, Peter poised on a teetering rock, Ingalls still clasping the staff like a magician's wand, and over all the sharp, clear sunlight. Already it was like a passing dream.

It was sundown when they reached the tethered horses, and the full moon was riding high above the mountains when they emerged from the woods out upon the open mesa.

Mary rode close to her husband. She would have held his hand. She had been in the shadow of death. She longed for the touch of human sympathy. They reached the arroyo. Chase reined in his horse, as he bade them good-night. Mary held out her hand to him. Her dark eyes were softly luminous.

"I shall not forget," she said.

Chase laughed lightly.

"Please do. I would like you to remember pleasanter things."

CHAPTER VI

OLD ACQUAINTANCES

THE next two weeks passed without any especial incidents. Chase had been to the house frequently, but Ingalls was usually away, and as a rule he made only brief calls. At first Mary had expressed surprise at seeing him alone, thinking evidently that Ingalls was with him. Latterly she had said nothing, merely remarking that her husband was away. Chase saw that she looked uneasy, if not worried. Even if Ingalls had not deliberately deceived her, he had let her infer that he was absent on the ranch with Chase. Chase was far more disturbed than Mary. He knew the symptoms of mining fever, and he could not conceal from himself that they were developing to an alarming degree. He went over and over again their interview, trying to recall if he had been too harsh and unsympathetic. Ingalls had come to him at first. Since that time he had not said a word, even about prospecting the ranch. Chase exonerated himself with the self-same conviction with which he would have weighed the words of another.

No. He shut his lips decisively. Ingalls was bound to have his way. Nothing would stop him.

He knew what Chase thought. He knew what his wife would think. He had weakly shut out his best, his safest friends, and was listening to others. With what results Chase, knowing his probable counselors, could foreshadow. He could only hope that Ingalls would stop short of moral, if not material ruin ; but his hopes, even, were not at all reassuring.

Chase had heard only flying rumors, nothing definite, but from these he judged that the mining excitement was waxing, rather than waning. The only thing he could do, was what perhaps he had neglected too long, keep himself actively informed as to what was going on at Manzanita, and thus be in a position to protect in a measure, when he could not openly interfere.

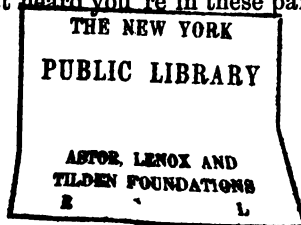
He had finished his noonday meal and was sitting under a piñon, deeply buried in thought. He was roused by a crunching of gravel, and a gnarled hand was thrust out to him.

"Shake!"

He looked up. A stout, stocky man stood before him. A battered hat was pushed back from a low, half bald head, a pair of shrewdly narrowing eyes, a nose broken and bent to one side, snags of teeth revealed by what was meant for a conciliatory smile, a bristly face on a bull neck. It was Tough Nut.

Without rising, Chase accepted the proffered hand.

"Jest heard you're in these parts. Jest thought



to myself, 'Mebbe Billy 'd like ter see 'n old acquaintance.' " He looked inquiringly, uncertain whether he had presumed too far.

A sudden inspiration came to Chase. Here was the very tool he had wanted, ready to his hand. It was this thought that lent more heartiness to his greeting than Tough Nut ordinarily would have received.

"Sure thing. I've been wanting to see you. Sit down."

He moved and pointed to a place under the tree. Tough Nut was surprised at his reception, but misinterpreted the animus. The smile grew somewhat less and a shrewd suspicion looked from his narrowing eyes. He accepted the proffered seat.

"Damned hot!" He took his hat from his head, and, drawing his loosely knotted handkerchief from his neck, mopped it over his face.

"Yes, after the mountains." Chase smiled. He had noted Tough Nut's look and recognized its paternity.

"What's yer lay?" Tough Nut glanced furtively at Chase and then to the cabin.

"Herding goats." Chase's smile was disconcerting.

"Like it?"

"Fairly. Better than prospecting, anyway."

"How's it pan?"

"Forty and chuck."

"Partners?"

"No. Plain forty a month job."

Tough Nut looked knowingly shrewd. One barren lid drooped over a watery eye.

"Oh, come, what's yer lay?" His eyes wandered over the grazing herds and rested on the ranch house, making a mental note of values.

"That's straight."

Tough Nut looked again at Chase. The smile was shrewder, the drooping lid more decided.

"Pretty woman, eh?"

He tendered a playful dig with his elbow. Then his face straightened and he shriveled. Occasionally in his life, he had looked into the business end of a gun, with a shooting eye glancing along the barrel. He recalled the feeling. This one was much like it.

"Say, pard, I did n't mean nothing. Goat herdin' did n't seem your size, that's all."

"I would n't think such things, or some time you'll let 'em out. Then it'll be bad medicine."

"Bet yer gun, I'm the boy ter know it. Say! Smutty Mike can't hear speak of yer now 'thout gettin' that white-gilled!" Tough Nut was nervously mending a bad break.

"What's in it? That I've been hearing about lately!"

"Sure, an' I'm a winner this time. Got ten thousand sinkers, an' ninety thousand more coming. Say! If yer broke, I don't mind a little divvy." He looked at Chase cautiously, with a touch of the old suspicion.

"Don't worry." Chase laughed. "I'm not broke."

"Damned if I don't believe it. Say! But ye're the stuff! Always light on yer feet. Gawd! How yer used ter plunge, too! Bronchos was n't in it with yer for fancy humps." Tough Nut looked at Chase, respectfully admiring. "Say! Met one of the old gang down to Peru. Asked for yer 'fore we'd uncoupled. Could n't say a thing till he'd gone over the way yer tamed Smutty Mike an' the gang."

"You've been down to Peru?"

"Yes, gone through all them greaser countries. Was down to Cerro, Peru, yer know. Say! That's lofty. Thought I's on the roof of the world, clean on the ridgepole, till I looked up. Damned if the frame wa'n't up for another story! Mountains! Say! These things do be nothin' but warts!"

"How'd you make out down there?"

"No chanst for a white man! Nothin' but dons and dagos. Dons so damn big they hated to have yer breathe like them. Dagos! Me'n Mike did n't make no strike minin'. Thought we'd tin-horn the greasers. Got out a pack or two an' said 'Monte.' Gawd! How they'd play! Me'n Mike thought we'd hit it. They seemed spilin' ter shed their dust. We milked 'em dry, an' got ready ter lave."

"Bring anything with you?"

"This." He opened his shirt and showed a long red scar. "Mike, he brought out a knife in his lung. Got it yet if he ain't coughed it up."

Chase laughed.

"Had a hard time, did n't you?"

"Tough! Say, that's drawin' it aisy. La Sals's good enough for me. Me 'n Mike lit for Moab first thing we hit Frisco. Say! the big Swede's over there. She is lookin' for yer. Holds up every one that hits the place. Say! but yer got the cunjer on her, sure; knows yer ain't in her class, too. Say! you's never soft on any of the girls, an' they're all gone on yer. Yer must be medicine, for sure, the way yer tamed the Big Swede."

Chase made an impatient gesture.

"That's right. Say! yer safe. Ain't one of the girls but 'ud fight ter hold yer up if yer were broke. Wisht I had that lay."

"Well, I'm not broke, and I'm not going to be, either."

"That's right, too. I've got a kind of a word for you from the Big Swede. Wanted me to tell you, if I ever saw you, that she'd got all yer pile. The twenty-five, yer know, that yer blowed in. She's got her rake-off, and Smutty Mike's, too. Says yer can have it any time yer want, an' no strings, neither."

"Well, I'm not going to call on her for it."

"Got a better lay?" Tough Nut eyed Chase cautiously.

"Yes, I think so. But anyway, the money's hers, and she's welcome to it."

"It's a heap, sure. Don't think yer lay'll top it."

"What lay?" Chase looked up sharply.

Tough Nut jumped.

"Why — er — that's part of what I come for. I can help you out if you say so. No divvy, neither. You'll see I ain't forgot."

"Out with it."

Tough Nut ventured an inquiring look.

"Well, say! Yer old man's just makin' a divvle of a fool of himself. He's that aisy. I got him strung, jest a little, yer know. Did it 'fore I knew yer's 'round. Did n' think 't was yer lay exactly, but thought I'd see yer. If he's yer meat, jest say so, an' I'm mum."

"He is n't my meat, but you listen hard. Ingalls is n't a fool, and he's my friend. Savey?"

"Do I, now?"

"You remember Dead Horse Gulch?"

Tough Nut squirmed uneasily.

"Say, pard, yer ain't goin' ter squeeze too hard, be yer? I'll chip in now, and more when I round up."

"Damnation! I don't want your dirty money. But I want you to go light on Ingalls."

"Sure an' I won't milk him a drop, not wan drop!" He breathed easier.

"Well," Chase went on, "keep me posted. If any one's going too hard, post them. Savey?"

"To the marrow."

"That's all. Only, if you see Smutty Mike, you might tell him I'd like to see him. Smutty's a good friend of mine." Chase grinned.

Tough Nut caressed his bald pate.

"I'm on cold. I'm slick, I am, if I ain't handsome. You know Tice? He kept me in drinks for a week. Gawd! he's jest chalkin' me up. When I got me draft, Tice he knew it. Says he, 'Tough Nut,' says he, 'you jest better keep that draft in me safe. Yer might lose it. Yer kin draw on me any time.' So I up 'n gets a rubber up me sleeve. Showed him the draft in a big envelope. The draft went up me sleeve, an' he's nussin' a sealed envelope with dummy insides. Here's the stuff." Tough Nut pulled out a buckskin bag, took out some papers, and showed Chase the draft. Tough Nut chuckled. "Suckers is jest naterally pizen ter me."

Chase glanced indifferently at the paper.

"That's your business; only don't forget what I said about Ingalls, and keep mum."

"Say! yer ain't asked me a thing about me strike. The Royal Flush, yer know." Tough Nut was puzzled by Chase's seeming indifference. Like all ignorant men, he was intensely suspicious.

Chase answered absently:—

"Oh, well, you've struck it rich. Take care of it."

Tough Nut looked shrewd again.

"That's me." He pulled a scrawl from his pocket and handed it to Chase.

DEAR PARD, [it ran,] "I've been playing in hard luck since we got back from Peru. I'm

onto a lay now that promises to pan big. If it does, I'll divvy square. I need a thousand to get it started. We've had some hard luck, but if we stick together, we'll pull her out all right.

Please send to the Big Swede at once. She's in it, too. I had to let her in.

Wishing you luck,

Affectionately,

MIKE.

"Wants ter pull me leg. I'm onto him. Me'n him's quits. He can't play no pardner racket."

Chase said nothing. Tough Nut scanned his face anxiously.

"He can't get no law on me, can he?"

Chase laughed as he returned the letter.

"Nothing but moral law."

"Moral law?" Tough Nut looked blank and anxious. "What t'ell's that?"

"Nothing that'll trouble you. Don't worry."

Tough Nut drew a deep sigh, wriggling uneasily.

"Say! I ain't got no friend but you that I can trust." He looked deprecatingly at Chase, half pausing.

"Well, go on."

"Them Eastern dudes's comin' out here to sign papers, et cetera. They can't count better'n I can, but signin'! sure they'll rope me there. Put the diamond hitch on me 'fore I know it." Again he paused.

"Well?" Chase was purposely tantalizing.

"Say! for the love of Gawd, come over 'n help me out! Yer onter such lays, an' I ain't. I'm slick some ways, but you! tar'd trip up on you; you're that slick. Yer'd go through me like quick through a heap er gold dust."

"Well, I'll help you on one condition."

Tough Nut's face fell. He was afraid of conditions.

"Name yer infant."

"Do what I told you. Keep quiet, but I want to know every move Ingalls makes. Head him off, if you can, but don't let him suspect. Savey?"

"Is that all? Why, that's aisy."

"Where's Mike now?"

"Over to Moab. The Big Swede's putting up for him. Thinks she'll work me, now I've struck it. It's no go. Say! she's a bird. Little minin' fever over at Moab. Lot of Eastern men come in there, an' she picked 'em. Picked 'em clean. I steered for 'er. Gawd! but we worked 'em. Thought I had a cinch. Asked her to take me in steady. Oh, no; she did n't bite. Jest looked at me. You know!" Tough Nut's eye drooped with a leering grin. "Said she's sorry me nose's broke. Said she'd like ter done it. Said she'd done a better job. Said she wa'n't flyin' fur no damned jays."

Chase was thinking of other things, and he grunted absently at Tough Nut's remarks. Tough Nut eyed him shrewdly, but cautiously.

"Say!" His voice sank confidentially, and he hitched slightly nearer. "She's got a pile, an' it's growin', too. Don't know what t'ell she's savin' fur; but she's savin'. Saltin' down all the time, big an' little. Some feller's goin' to git it aisy. Say!" His voice sank lower. "She tried to do me dirt. Now I ain't insinueratin'. I want ter hev yer help me out. I know yer ain't me class; but yer white. That's it; yer white. All the boys knows it. Y' ought ter hear 'em talk. Ain't no feller says anythin' else, 'less he's tenderfoot, or hankerin' fer vilent death. Hell's fire! I'm rattlin' ter beat a sky pilot. But say! it's jest this. If yer ever want ter call the Big Swede, an' ain't got the hand, jest call on me. She's hell and tiger cats; but she's drillin' a missed hole, and, by Gawd, I know where 't is!" Tough Nut smote his fist upon his knees.

"All right, Tough Nut; only don't count too much on me. Now you'd better amble. I don't want Ingalls to see you here, now or any other time; and, say, you'd better not mention that you know me in Manzanita, not just yet."

Tough Nut rose.

"That's all right; but you'll sure help me out with them fellers?"

"Sure thing; good-by."

"Good-by." Tough Nut gave his trousers an extra hitch and walked away muttering, "He's white. Ain't my class, but he's white."

In former days Tough Nut had regarded Chase

as a god. Absence had weakened his feelings. He parted from him now with increased reverence.

The renewal of his acquaintance with Tough Nut gave Chase a good deal of satisfaction. He was sure now that within certain limits he could keep a check on Ingalls, not so strong that he could keep him from wasting his time, or even hold him from material ruin, only keep him from becoming the prey of the thousand and one worthless characters that sneaked like vicious jackals on the heels of every mining boom.

Since the interview in which Ingalls had broached the subject of prospecting, and had been met with a plain statement of what could be expected from it, Chase had seen little or nothing of him. When they had met, Ingalls had been rather distant, and had studiously avoided any reference to their former conversation. Chase knew that it was not because Ingalls had dismissed the subject, but because he was either seeking, or had found, other sources where his advances would be met with a reception more in consonance with his own ideas.

This Chase could not prevent. What he could do, and what he intended to do, was to keep in close touch with his movements. Then, when Ingalls became hopelessly entangled and was forced to see the real animus of his pretended friends, he could help him to free himself and to start anew. Active interference now would only drive him more resolutely on his way, so Chase was waiting till the proper time should come.

It was a strange drama in which Chase had been playing for the last ten years. He was the only son of a prosperous lawyer in a small New England city. It had been the dearest wish of his father's heart that his son should take up his own profession. To that end Chase had been educated at one of the great Eastern universities, and later had been graduated with the highest honors from a law school. Then came the blow which dashed his father's long-cherished hopes. Chase had told his father that he had an almost uncontrollable aversion to the practice of law, that he had had for a long time a strong desire to go West. While in college, he had led in athletics, and the idea of settling down in a stuffy office had grown so repugnant to him that he had yielded at last to his desire. It had not come as a light impulse, but he deliberately had balanced his desire against his father's wishes, and in spite of the pain he was conscious of inflicting, he recognized his right to live his own life, and he had entered upon it. He had brought but little money with him, determined to make his own way.

He often grimly thought, as he reviewed his life in the West, that even his dearest friend could but admit that his success had not been brilliant. He knew what his dearest friend could not know, that he was laying a deep, strong foundation upon which, should the occasion arise, he could safely build. He had started life as a cowboy on one of the largest ranches in New Mexico. He had

worked faithfully for nearly two years, and was already foreman of the ranch. He felt that he could rise no farther in this place, and, though not foolishly fickle, he wanted to gain new experiences in other Western fields, before he finally selected his vocation.

It was about this time that rumors of rich mining fields in what was then known as the San Juan country in Colorado, came to his ears. He promptly resigned his position, much to the disgust of the ranchmen, and started for his new field.

His very first venture had been successful. He had taken a lease on a partially developed claim belonging to a woman named Hilda Bergstrom, generally known as the Big Swede. In a little more than a year, he had taken out clear of royalties and other expenses over twenty thousand dollars. His lease ran for two years. His success excited the cupidity of the woman, and he had been subjected to many annoyances that threatened still more serious complications. The result of these was an offer on her part to sell out to him entirely for one hundred thousand dollars, a spot cash payment of twenty-five thousand, and the balance of it in three yearly payments without interest. He had met these payments to the end of the third year; then the unexpected happened. The ore shoot on which he had been working gave out suddenly. In miners' parlance, it had been cut out by a fault, leaving only a smooth, barren wall of rock. He had saved a few thousand dollars

in excess of the payments; but in less than a year, it had all been spent in a fruitless endeavor to find the missing vein, and for the time, he had to abandon the property.

Without a penny to his name, he started out as a prospector pure and simple. His luck seemed to have deserted him, for while he was able to pay his own way and even to get a little ahead, at the end of six years of prospecting, he was scarcely better off than when he began. His hitherto unrequited labors, instead of depressing him, only served to strengthen him in his purpose to succeed, and to succeed in the very lines that appeared to thwart him. He had at last located a claim which, to his now experienced eye, gave rich future promises, but for its development it needed more money than he at present had.

After duly recording it and doing the requisite assessment for the current year, he had started out with the idea of earning money with which to develop his claim. Ingalls was the first man who had offered him work, and he had accepted it at once. He could have borrowed money; he had had offers of partnership; but these were not consonant with his determination. He wanted to make his way, alone and unaided.

CHAPTER VII

THE TROUBLING OF THE POOLS

SIMPLY because a betrousered biped reaches mature years and wears whiskers, it does not follow that he becomes a god, knowing good from evil. Nor because a man has descended from Plymouth Rock and sings hymns through his nose, does he exercise his godly possibilities, embracing the good and eschewing the evil. The divine is a possibility of every man ; it becomes an actuality only through deliberate choice. No one can suck up the juice of thistles and grow figs. The fruit of thistle juice is thorns ; of fig-trees a nourishing fruit.

-Ingalls had years and whiskers ; Tice had Plymouth Rock and a twanging nose ; Tough Nut had himself and "ter hell wid yer grandfather."

Ingalls and Tough Nut stood before the rude bar over which Tice was wont to pass counterfeit whiskey and gather in therefor good and lawful money. Diminutive glasses stood before Ingalls and Tough Nut, and Tice was dropping into each the minimum that would pass for a drink. He rolled the bottle in his hand, careful that each drop should go in the glass, or, preferably, return to the bottle, working his lips, meanwhile, with reverential

smacks, and lifting his eyes with the devotional ardor of a drinking hen. He reached for the cork, as he straightened the bottle.

"Fill it up, man, fill it up! Is it gould?" Tough Nut's voice tempered indignation with pleading protest.

"Oh, take it down, and keep quiet," Ingalls remonstrated laughingly. "Tice knows the limit."

"It's kill or cure, an' I have the hell of a thirst on me. Fill it up to the salvation of yer damned soul." Tough Nut shoved his glass to Tice, who resignedly filled it. "Gawd!" said Tough Nut, caressing the brimming glass. "If I swalleyed yer feelin's wid yer pizen, it's one hell of a comotion me bo'ols 'ud see."

Ingalls raised his glass.

"Here's to your good luck that is, and to mine that's coming!"

"Good luck comin' 's damned poor stuff ter kape yer backbone from chafin' yer belly; but here's to it!"

Ingalls, half-strangled, reached for the swimming glass of water which Tice, with the balming consciousness of a good deed that cost him nothing, shoved towards him.

"Have another?" asked Ingalls, with brimming eyes.

"Not till I've said prayers for the rest of me soul." Tough Nut smacked his lips, looked disdainfully at the proffered water, and drew the back of his hand across his mouth.

Ingalls, turning to a little table, looked inquiringly over his shoulder at Tough Nut. Tough Nut, as became the dignity of a superior, lowered himself into a chair, leaned back, stretching out one leg, to the end that he might draw from his pocket his pipe and tobacco. Ingalls leaned on the table, waiting submissively for Tough Nut to lead the conversation.

Tough Nut was provokingly deliberate. The awe of Chase was upon him; the certainty of his assistance in the coming negotiations, the censorship of Ingalls which Chase had imposed upon him, all tended towards a complacent mind; but the greatest of all was the prospect of drilling a tenderfoot.

Ingalls impatiently drummed on the table, while Tough Nut packed his pipe and lifted it to his mouth with loud-smacking lips, as he applied a match.

“When will you go?”

“Go where, me boy? There’s four points to a compass, and a lot of fillin’ between.” Tough Nut’s breath was laboriously wheezing through his broken nose.

“Why, to the La Sals, of course. That’s where you said. Perhaps you were drunk and forgot.”

“Drunk or sober, I knew me business. Tice, ye divil, have ye me papers?”

“In the safe, Mr. — er — er — ”

“Mr. be damned! ’T was Tough Nut ye

bounced whin I had n't a cint, and it's Tough Nut now that me pants is lined; all but to you! Trisures in hiven!" he snorted. "'In God we trust'! 'Tis fine words, but most convincin' on the back of an eagle."

Tice washed his hands in air.

"Yes, I've got to make a livin' — er — Tough Nut. It's too true. Sellin' whiskey is n't what I was brought up to, but I've got to make a livin'."

Tough Nut turned a grinning eye to Ingalls.

"'T is a fine chune he plays wid his nose. He chinks one dollar to the back of another to pitch it by, I take note."

Ingalls shifted uneasily. Tough Nut saw it with satisfaction.

"Well, let's get down to business. You've made your pile. I've got mine to make."

"Well, me business is done be tendin' to it. Take note of that. 'T is worth your while."

"Oh, damn!" Ingalls was losing his temper. "That's what I'm trying to do."

Tough Nut looked benevolent.

"Will ye take the advice of a successful man, meanin' meself?"

"I have n't been chasing you for your beauty." Ingalls was thoroughly exasperated.

Tough Nut was placid.

"Then go back to yer goats. Ye'll shear more money from their backs than from the point of a pick, and *no es un sueño*, as the greasers say."

"Are n't you going to the La Sals with me?"

"What! An' drink alkali, an' shlake on the sand? Me do that wid a good drunk waitin' me each night? Tice, ye devil?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is me credit good?"

"For anything I have — er — Tough Nut."

"Take note of that, an' thin ask me will I go to the La Sals!"

"But you said you would go with me!" Ingalls could not hide his bitter disappointment.

"I've changed me mind. Reflection did it. Lead us not into temptation! 'T is the good book said it. Be the same token, don't lead another. Tice, are ye listenin'?"

"Oh, of course."

"Have I misspoken?"

"No, indeed. It's from the Gospel accordin' to" —

"Mesilf." Tough Nut looked complacently at Ingalls. "Tice, ye devil?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you go trapsin' to the mountains wid a damned tinderfut if you had me pile?"

"Indeed I would n't. I'd go straight back to New England."

"More fool you! Ye'd make yersilf a long journey for nothin'. Ye'd be no closer hell in New England than right here."

"What did you mean by telling me you'd go prospecting with me?"

"Me? Just feelin' of ye a bit; that's all."

"Feeling of me?" Ingalls burst out furiously.

"Yes. 'T is a long time since I was a damn fool, an' I wanted to get the sinse of it by proxy."

"Damn your impertinent skin!" growled Ingalls. "If your nose was n't broken I'd do it for you."

"The devil's good to his own," placidly remarked Tough Nut. "Me broken nose has saved many black eyes from mournin' over broken heads."

Ingalls rose and stamped from the room out into the dusty street. He was filled with bitter rage, not at the frustration of his plans, — that was not final, — but at the cool, patronizing manner of Tough Nut.

Tough Nut was the better man of the two. He selected his associates with the indifference of an artist his colors. Force of mind, power of money: these appealed to him. To the one he bent with the fear of a heathen before a stone god. The other he regarded as an Eskimo a fat whale. His instincts, moulded by his surroundings, guided him unerringly. The contemptuous complacency of conscious possession stood forth from him, unveiled by the polish of refinement, in brutal frankness. Ingalls and Tough Nut! The mainspring in each was practically the same. Only? The one you saw: the other was masked.

Tough Nut eyed the retreating Ingalls with evident satisfaction.

"Sure," he muttered to himself, "Billy Chase

could n't do better nor that. Say! I can see the grin in his eyes. Tice, ye devil!"

"Yes, sir. What is it?"

"Wor ye listenin'?"

"Indeed I was."

"Did n't I do the boy ter rights?"

"No doubt of it; no doubt at all."

"Are me papers safe?" Tough Nut looked anxious.

"Safe as safe can be."

"I belave ye." Tough Nut caressed a slight bulge in his shirt.

Chase was due for dinner at the ranch house that day; but he had sent word by Peter that he could not be present for dinner. He would come later.

He had seen little of Ingalls, and almost nothing of Mary, since their trip to the mountains. He knew that the adventure of that day had deeply affected her,—beyond the mere vulgar fear of death.

As Chase neared the house, the closing chords of "The Pilgrim Chorus" floated to his ears. It was a favorite of Mary's. While she had no exceptional technique, she played with an expression and feeling of her own. Chase waited till the last notes died away, and then rode on. Peter and Bartholomew were in the room. As Chase entered, Mary rose from the piano and greeted him, the emotion born of music still lingering in her eyes.

"I've been playing for Peter," she said. Then, glancing at Peter a little mischievously, "He likes my music better than my painting."

"Oh, Peter has his limitations, after all." Chase smiled, as he turned to greet Peter.

"If the lady put that in her pictures what she puts in her music, then would there be hope." Peter shook his head resolutely.

"Peter," replied Mary with feigned reproach, "your compliments are dubious. That would have been very nice, only you spoiled it by saying *if*."

"The ready-made good iss of no account, lady. It iss the seeing of that which iss not good, and the striving to make the not good better that iss of use." Peter, having thus delivered himself, left the room with Bartholomew.

"Is n't Peter refreshing?" laughed Mary. "His answers always leave one a little uncomfortable."

"A little discomfort is good for us. It keeps us from becoming too sure of ourselves."

"Meanwhile, let's go out on the piazza. It's cooler."

She picked up the little ground hog, which had retreated under the sofa at sight of Bartholomew, and remained there, clashing his teeth and making grimaces at his supposed enemy. Outside the little irrigated oasis the sun was white-hot and glaring. Inside, the sheltering vines tempered the daylight with grateful shadows.

"Why did n't you come over to dinner?" Mary asked, as she sat down.

"Too much discomfort in the shape of goats."

"That's fortunate, as long as discomfort is good for one. I've lots of things to ask you."

"Well?"

There was a long pause. Mary looked thoughtful, absently stroking the little rodent that lay curled up in her lap, sleeping peacefully.

"The mountains were grand that day, and — I am frightened yet. I wake up in the night and feel myself slipping, slipping" —

"You did n't look as frightened as you do now. You ought to do as I told you, remember pleasanter things."

"Well, then," after a pause, "who do you suppose was here to dinner, the other day?"

"That's more like it. Peter?"

"No. Guess again."

"That's nearly my limit. I shall have to go out into the world next, and the world's wide."

"Is Peter your limit? I was in hopes that I might be included."

"Why, of course. I took you for granted."

"Don't! But guess. I don't imagine he's out of your limit."

"Who? Peter?"

"No. Tough Nut." Mary looked inquiringly at Chase.

He started visibly. Mary turned away satisfied.

"How long ago?" Chase was wondering whether it was before or after Tough Nut's visit at the cabin.

"About a week, I think. Why?"

"Oh, nothing in particular."

"That's evasive. Never mind, though. I've been thinking." She spoke reflectively.

"If you had said you had n't, that would have surprised me," Chase interrupted, hopeful of a diversion.

She laughed lightly and shook her head.

"He's made a lot of money."

"Has found it," corrected Chase.

"It's the same thing."

"Not quite. You remember the sleet-storms in New England?"

"Yes. What of them?"

"Why, this. The ice broke down the trees."

"I'm stupid," admitted Mary, "so please tell me what sleet-storms and broken-down trees have to do with wealth."

"I did n't say wealth. I said sudden wealth. What I meant was this. People who acquire sudden wealth are apt to give way under the strain."

"Your suggestion was very good. But I've seen trees break down under a load of fruit. That was n't sudden."

"That's all right, too. People often get more than's good for them."

"Even when they get it gradually?"

"Even so." Chase was absently fumbling in his pocket. "Did Tough Nut say that he knew me?" he asked abruptly.

"No. I just imagined he did." She was rather

puzzled to know the relations between Chase and Tough Nut. "Smoke, if you want to ; you know I don't mind."

Chase rolled a cigarette, but kept silent.

"How did you happen to come West?" she asked, with sudden inconsequence.

The question was rather pleasing to Chase. People in the West take each other for granted. The exchange of personalities heralds abiding friendship.

"Atavism, I think," he answered rather abruptly.

Mary looked at him in puzzled surprise.

"That's a convenient term," he explained. "When I do something I can't account for, I lay it to my ancestors."

"Meaning that in this instance you did n't know what you were about?" She smiled quizzically.

"I'm afraid that's it," he admitted.

"That does n't seem characteristic of you." She spoke more seriously.

"Well, really, I always wanted to. That's equivalent to 'because.'" He rose and leaned against the railing, his hands plunged in his pockets. "I've been more successful than you think, perhaps."

"I've no doubt of it." She spoke still more earnestly, paying little heed to her words.

A quiet chuckle recalled her.

"Oh, I did n't mean that," she hastened to explain.

"You're quite right, anyway. I began out here as a cowboy, then became foreman of the ranch, then a prospector. Now I'm herding goats. Your husband says I'm doing well. If you only knew goats, you'd appreciate what I've accomplished."

He spoke banteringly with a purpose. He wanted to avoid disagreeable subjects. Tough Nut had visited the ranch, probably on Ingalls's invitation. Tough Nut was a prospector; therefore Ingalls had not given up his notion. Tough Nut he had warned off; but Tough Nut was only one of many. This was his reasoning. His conclusion was that Mary was getting anxious and had good grounds for it.

"I think I can appreciate it as it is. But you have n't told me why you came West."

"I think the real reason was this: my life was cut out for me in the East. When that is done, the spice of it is taken away."

Mary sat silent and thoughtful. She was conscious that, after many words, she was no nearer gaining what she wished from Chase than when she began. She was not a strong woman in the sense of being able to state problems clearly and work them out to logical ends.

The power of definition implies the power of solution. State your problem; its solution is a matter of volition.

Almost from the first, Chase had attracted her. Further acquaintance strengthened her first impressions. She felt the need of a strong friend,

one who would listen to her with sympathy, who would aid her with his strength. She had told him the truth, when she said the West frightened her, and she also spoke the truth when she told him she could not tell just why. His answer seemed to her to have been studiously evasive ; but why ?

In the thronging life of the East there is the kaleidoscopic change of strength and weakness, success and failure, weaving out and in against the background of mediocrity. It takes a steady eye to select and to follow out a single thread in the tangled web, a strong mind to reason why this thread works out to honor and that to dishonor. In the West, actions are few and actors are numerically less. Strength and weakness, success and failure, alike stand out in bold relief against a merciless background. A gigantic sequoia in a forest is only one of many. Remove it from its fellows, its magnitude overwhelms you.

Had Mary's life been cast in the East, she might have longed for the high places of the earth, but she would have feared them and ended with being fairly content with mediocrity. As she saw the West, it was a place of magnificent strength or of repulsive weakness. It was a place where the elements of success lay in plain sight, ready to aid the strong or to crush the weak. Mediocrity was impossible.

Chase perplexed her. From the first, she had refused to take him at his outward valuation. Further acquaintance increased rather than dimin-

ished her perplexity. Clear-headed, unerring in judgment of men and things, he was apparently content with the ability to align, but without the ambition to build. Keenly alive to the elements which made for distinction, he was yet herding goats, apparently at peace with himself and the world.

She was not vulgarly curious, but she could not help wondering about his past, and what was his object in the future. He had come into her life, and his strength attracted her. She could not help reverting to the question, "Why was Chase so vague when she touched, or tried to touch, questions of vital importance to her?" Chase was also thinking. If one might judge from the expression of his eyes and the compressed smile on his lips, his thoughts were also of his past, and they were grimly humorous.

"Was your life cut out for you?" she asked.

"Yes, so far as it could be for any one. The personal equation can never be wholly eliminated, you know."

"Well, then," she looked at him with a half-serious smile which betrayed the fact that her perplexity was not in regard to Chase alone, "has the spice compensated you?"

"Count no man happy till he is dead."

"Did you ever make a strike? That's what Tough Nut called it, I believe."

"Oh, yes, once I made my pile."

"What happened?"

"The tree broke down."

"Was it fruit or ice?"

"Fruit decays and ice melts. Why try to give a name to that which was, but is not?" He laughed. "You see, I lost all I found, — lost it almost as quickly as I found it. I don't regret my loss, only my folly. I suppose it's very painful to a lobster to shed his skin, but it's his only way of growing."

"Which being interpreted" — She looked up insistently.

"Means that experience teaches a school where fools may gather wisdom if they will."

His face grew thoughtful. She watched him, wondering, anxious. At last he spoke, slowly and evenly.

"In a way I have been unfortunate in life. I have absolutely no one dependent on me. I could have gone abroad and traveled. My father wanted me to go, but I preferred the West. The life here is fascinating. It's the fascination of shooting rapids with a canoe. There are waves to swallow you up, and rocks to dash yourself against, and the rush and roar of the current thrills you. The fear of death is the crown of your joy, just to measure your strength against that of the current, and to come off victor."

"But that is narrow and selfish. You let the weak go down. You only care for success." She spoke with growing excitement. She had forgotten Chase; she was thinking of her husband.

Chase hardly noticed her.

"Men live in daily contact with tremendous natural forces out here, and they are contagious. Even weak men learn to despise weakness. They learn to respect power, power of mind, strength of character. Money is power and strength, here, as everywhere, and they worship it. Strong men acquire it, and rejoice in their strength. They fail, and their strength is not impaired; they are strong even in death. The weak occasionally stumble on wealth; it is their destruction. They fail, and their failure is death."

Mary felt a great oppression; something fateful surrounding, overwhelming her. She looked up at Chase with troubled eyes.

"You have put into words what I have half felt,—only half felt." She emphasized the last words with a wavering smile. "But is there no help? Not always, perhaps, but sometimes?" Her voice was pathetic in its eagerness.

Chase was gravely thoughtful. Mary's questions were pushing him to the point where he must choose between his intentions and her evident purpose. He could no longer even pretend ignorance of her wishes. He spoke deliberately:—

"I can speak with assurance in general; but not in particular. There is so much that one is bound to consider. Why not do the best we can, and wait?"

Mary in her turn grew thoughtful. She could read between Chase's words, and she felt strongly

their truth. But she could not rest content with vague intuitions; she must have solid ground.

"In general, then?" she asked.

Chase spoke with evident reluctance.

"Men with half-ossified spines are sometimes put in strait-jackets. But the strait-jackets are uncomfortable, and they cast them aside. They prefer comfortable humps to painful rigidity."

Mary listened with anxious, downcast eyes. Her question was hardly audible.

"That is n't all. I want you to tell me why."

"Because it's human nature. Next to the love of life is the pride of self. The weaker the man, the stronger his vanity. You can always help a strong man; a weak one rarely or never."

Mary spoke with an effort:—

"If you saw a weak man going to destruction, would you not try to save him?"

"Please let me say one thing more. I think you look too much on the darker side of possibilities. You should remember that there are always two possibilities where there's one. Otherwise, we should be ignorant of hope."

There was a clatter of hoofs, and Ingalls rode up to the gate. There was a sullen look in his eyes as he came up the path. They rested a moment on Mary, then on Chase.

"Hello!" he said. "The goats improving? Sorry I could n't get home to dinner. I really forgot you were to be here." His manner was forced, for resentment against Tough Nut still burned hot within him.

"I did n't forget," replied Chase; "but I had to send regrets, and then I brought explanations."

He sat for a little while talking indifferently with Ingalls. He saw that something had upset him, and he wanted to find the trouble without direct questioning; but Ingalls avoided even indirect references to his encounter. Chase finally rose to go.

"Better stay to supper, Chase. There's no hurry." Ingalls spoke cordially with his old-time manner.

"I should like to, but I don't count with much certainty on those goats. They're liable to break out in a new spot any time." He bade Mary and Ingalls good-night, and rode away. "Ingalls has been to Manzanita. He's seen Tough Nut, and come back with a grouch," he reflected. "I stirred up Tough Nut the other day; he's read the riot act to Ingalls. *Voilà tout!* That's the size of it." He grinned and spurred up his horse.

He overtook Peter stumping along, evidently deeply absorbed. Judging from his manner his thoughts were not pleasant.

"Hello, old man!" Chase spoke cheerfully. "Coming to stay with me to-night? You'd better," he added. "It's getting late."

"He shall gif his angels charge over thee, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Peter spoke moodily, not answering directly.

"You're thinking of Ingalls?"

"*Nein*, of what use iss it to pick stones from

the path of fools? They luff to break their toes and bruise their shins. No; I wass thinking of the lady. She will tear her fingers and make herself to ache, and when she cries out for help, there will that man be!" He ended with a sweeping gesture.

Chase rode on in silence.

"I may want to go over to Manzanita before long, Peter. Will you look after the goats?" he said, after an interval.

"Any time, man dear, when you want me. Don't ask. Are we not old friends?"

"Won't you stay with me to-night?"

"Not to-night. I will to-night be alone."

Mary entered the house and began preparations for supper. Ingalls remained outside, gloomily kicking his heels against the rungs of his chair. Mary was thinking of many things, but all along the same line. Chase's words appalled her. They were the more appalling because she realized their truth. Were they true without exception? There were the teachings of her childhood days, the unquestioning insistence that every wayward life could be reclaimed by personal influence animated by the spirit of God. But the teachings of nature — "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

Her wearied brain refused longer to work, only a confused jumble of assertion and contradiction. Just one thing was clear: she must save her husband from himself. Mary was not an effusive woman; but to-night she felt a great wave of ten-

derness rising within her. It was not a simple emotion, but rather the resultant of many. There were elements of resentment, indignation, and reparation, — resentment against Chase for the magnificent power with which he resolved the conflicting elements of life, and bent them to his will; indignation that this had been denied to her husband and lavished on another; a feeling of reparation to her husband for her apparent disloyalty, in that she had seen and admired in another what he did not possess. The cool cynicism of Chase, indifferently toying with his power and despising those who lacked it! What if her husband had deceived her? Was she not a party to the deception? Had he deceived her, after all? Was it not rather that his finer nature was not fitted to cope with the merciless, brutal forces which surrounded and threatened him?

Her cheeks were burning, her eyes were dim with unshed tears. She went out on the veranda. Ingalls was now leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. She could not see his face. She dropped on one knee, with her arm around his shoulders.

"Herbert," she sobbed, "let's go back to our old home. Take me away from this horrid place. I hate it — hate it!"

"What's that, Molly?" Ingalls was genuinely surprised.

She sprang to her feet with flaming eyes.

"I hate it, I tell you! I hate it! See!" She

flung out wildly at the little garden. "Look at it, all green and blossoms, and I could kill it with just a turn of my hand! To-morrow it would all be dead! Take me back to New England!"

Ingalls drew her to him. He gently smoothed her hair, and tried to lift the drooping head.

"What is it, Molly? What's started you off this way?"

"You've been so strange and troubled for a long time, Herbert. I don't understand it."

He made no reply. Her head was still bowed. She could not see his eyes; she only felt his soothing hand. She spoke as in a dream.

"This brutal, struggling craze for wealth! Just for wealth and power! The bitter mercilessness of it! I hate it! I loathe it!" She shivered, as, still clinging to him, she raised her eyes to his. "You are too good for this dreadful life, Herbert!"

Ingalls spoke with a gathering frown.

"What nonsense has Chase been stuffing into your brain, Molly?"

"It is n't nonsense at all, Herbert. He only told me what I already half knew. He just told me of his own life, and what he has seen in others' lives. It's dreadful, Herbert, simply dreadful! He did n't tell me this; I could see it all from what he did tell me."

The frown gathered more deeply.

"Chase has no business to frighten you so. And, Molly," he spoke deliberately, "you've no

business to let him. I can take care of myself, and of you, too. He's been knocking around this country for ten years or more. What has he done? A cattle ranger, a leaser. He made a little money, but he did n't know enough to keep it. Then a prospector. Got down to his uppers. Now he's herding goats. He's made a total failure and he's soured. I don't want to hurt you, Molly, but what kind of a man is he to go to for advice?"

"I did n't ask him for advice, Herbert." Mary spoke slowly. She tried to recall if she had asked for advice. Then, reassured, she spoke decidedly. "He is a strong man, Herbert. He has seen a great deal of life out here. He is scrupulously upright. He did n't tell me that," she added hurriedly. "I could see that for myself."

She would have gone on; but Ingalls interrupted, with a harsh laugh:—

"He's a conceited fool. That's what he is. He's made a total failure. He can't help seeing that, and he thinks, because he's made a failure himself, no one else can succeed. He can't scare me, so he's taking it out on you."

"He did n't try to scare me."

"Well, he did just the same. Look here, Mary," he spoke with decision; "men have their work to do, and women have theirs. When women try to interfere with things that don't concern them, they make trouble, useless trouble, for their husbands and for themselves."

Mary made as if to reply, but he stopped her.

"Wait," he said, with an impatient pressure on her shoulder. "Chase is conceited, thinks he knows it all. He does n't mean to make trouble, but he can't get sensible men to listen to him, so he just takes it out on women. It tickles him when he can scare a woman out of her senses. Look at that crazy lunatic, Peter! Every one laughs at him, and he knows enough to keep his mouth shut to men; but he'll spout nonsense by the hour to rattle-headed women."

Mary's face paled. Ingalls strode to the railing, leaving her alone.

"But, Herbert," she said; "look at Tough Nut! You know what he is, a drunken, worthless wretch, and yet he has found one of the biggest mines in the country. He's rich now, or will be, but who wants to make money by blind chance. Just think of it, Herbert! A whole life risked and wasted, perhaps!"

Ingalls's face grew hard. Her words recalled his humiliating interview with Tough Nut. Blindly he lashed out from between compressed lips, —

"Now it's Tough Nut, is it? The confounded, insolent, contemptible Irishman! You must think I'm in bad shape! I'm going to push this thing through. I can do it, and do it alone, too. I'm not going to settle down here and let moss grow on my back. There's a chance to make a strike here. I'm going to put in a bid, and I'm going to talk high, too."

"Don't make a mistake at the outset, Herbert. Mr. Chase and Peter are your friends. You'll make a mistake, if you turn them from you, or if you consider them fools." She spoke with a decision that only irritated Ingalls the more.

"Chase is dead broke and soured, Peter's crazy. Tough Nut's too set up by his strike to be decent. They're a fine lot to take council with; are n't they now?"

Mary was silent.

"I'll show them," he went on, "that I'm not a fool and I'm not crazy. It may take time; but I'll show them."

He looked at Mary's anxious face. It betrayed more than anxiety. She was struggling against the recognition of that which she had never before seen in her husband, that which, if she ever came to recognize it clearly and without mistake, would fill her with disgust. Ingalls's reply had revealed the shallow nature of the man. With him, a flattering word or a soothing smile had power to heal a smarting wound. He did not distinguish between a superficial scratch and a burrowing cancer rooted deep in the vitals.

"Don't worry, Molly; I'm all right."

In olden times, an angel troubled a pool and its waters became healing to those who bathed in them. But it was only an opportunity, after all. The sick had first to recognize their infirmities.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROYAL FLUSH

TOUGH NUT was directing his mind in a very unaccustomed channel. His pipe was out, his lips parted, his face lined with laborious wrinkles, and, most telling fact of all, he actually had not heard Tice anxiously inquiring if he would take something.

Tice had regarded with alarm Tough Nut's abstraction, and was fearful lest he might be meditating a change of habit. This would materially interfere with Tice's account book. Consequently he was wrought up to the point of offering to stand treat. He mentally assured himself that the treat would be a *bona fide* one, which certified to the extent of his mental agitation. If he had chosen to think on the subject, he would have known very well that his generosity would not be beyond recall; that if the alarm should prove to be false, he could still charge the drink to Tough Nut, and excuse himself with the thought that it had been obtained under false pretenses, and that this would justify him.

Tice was a very just man, as became one with a Puritan ancestry. He always weighed the possible doubt scrupulously, and ended by taking care that

the benefit of it inured to his own advantage. To this end, when Tough Nut was giving orders in rapid sequence, he, Tice, was often confused, and, to make perfectly sure, he charged Tough Nut's account with all his orders and added a few more for good measure.

Had he been able to read Tough Nut's thoughts, hazy and indistinct as they were to Tough Nut, his anxiety would have been increased a thousand-fold. Tice, in Tough Nut's words, was "nussin' a sealed envelope with dummy insides." No one but Tough Nut knew there were other strings to the draft than the one he had affixed, to the end that it might disappear up his sleeve and ultimately rest in the pocket of his shirt. The possible effect of the other strings on the trustful serenity of Tice disturbed not one whit the artful Tough Nut. He would have enjoyed putting up a hand on the old skinflint; but Chase was another affair. As a matter of fact, the draft itself was little better than a dummy, as it was a contingent one. The draft was only payable when a cross-cut should have tested the Royal Flush below the outcrop and proved the vein undiminished in size and value.

Tough Nut had four men at work in this cross-cut, day and night, and it was a matter only of a few days before the vein should be opened. He really had no doubt but that the vein would prove up all right. If it did, he would have to settle up square. But he knew very well the uncertainty of all things connected with prospects, however

promising, and he had shaped his course accordingly. He had worked Tice on the strength of the draft, to the end that this good man, for a liberal consideration, was putting up the necessary supplies, and so Tice would be held for wages. Tough Nut's available assets were very limited, being confined chiefly to the clothes he had on his back, a pair of burros turned out in the mountains, and a prospecting kit cached in their vicinity. Thus, should necessity arise, he could readily shake the dust of any locality from his feet, to say nothing of the liabilities which he might have incurred. Pulling his freight under these conditions troubled his conscience as little as did the dust on his shoes. Dust did not disturb the comfort of his shoes, nor unredeemed promises the serenity of his mind. Only there was Chase.

He had not really deceived Chase, nor had he received any favors from him under false pretenses. It was only a vague, uncomfortable dread of those boring eyes that would drag murder from the dustiest corner of his soul, had it been there. The memory of Dead Horse Gulch was still vigorously alive. There was nothing really incriminating in that little episode of his life, only a dummy game and a shooting tenderfoot who was not quick enough with his gun. The game was a secret one, the locality was isolated, and Chase had been far away. Both Tough Nut and Smutty Mike, and even the Big Swede, had revealed everything to the minutest detail, under no compulsion

except of the eyes that demanded everything and got it.

Tough Nut smoothed his face and relighted his pipe.

"Tice, ye divil!" His tone was incisive.

"Yes, sir."

"Put me up two quarts of yer best stuff."

"Yes, sir. You ain't goin' to leave us, are you?" Tice was selecting the bottles.

"Are me papers safe?"

Tice glanced over his shoulder.

"Certainly, sir." For his own satisfaction, more than for Tough Nut's, he pulled out and exhibited the sealed envelope.

"Then attend to me orders, an' don't be askin' questions of yer betthers that don't concern ye."

He took the bottles from Tice and strode out of the door. He left the main trail and picked his way through the piñon and cedar that fringed the foot of the talus. The way was longer and more difficult, but he would avoid Ingalls should he chance to be coming in. Further, he would, undiscovered, be able to overlook the herder's cabin and note if the coast were clear. He had determined to make a clean breast of the whole thing to Chase, not because he wanted to, but because he must. Like many another man, he was doing what was right, not because it was right, but because there was a possibility of future embarrassments threatening any other course.

He reached a point within a stone's throw of the

cabin. Chase was sitting in his usual place under a piñon. An open book was in his hand. He raised his eyes occasionally and took note of his grazing herds. Near by his pony, saddled, stood with drooping head, the bridle trailing on the ground within easy reach. The coast was apparently clear; but Tough Nut had the fear of Chase upon him, and took no chances. He picked up a twig and threw it at Chase. Chase turned and saw Tough Nut peering from behind a boulder.

"Oh, hello, Tough Nut! what's up? Come down. It's all right."

Tough Nut was awaiting orders. He came forth and seated himself.

"Say — er — damned hot! eh?"

"Yes, fairly. You did n't come all the way from Manzanita to tell me that?" Chase eyed him with a grin.

"Say, now! Yer dead right." Tough Nut squirmed uneasily.

"You saw Ingalls the other day?" Chase spoke with indifferent assurance.

Tough Nut looked relieved. The evil hour was put off.

"There now, did n't I tell you? You are slick! slick as slick! Did Ingalls cough up?"

"Not a word. But you spurred him, all the same."

"Say, now, I did. Spurred him for sure. An' he bucked. Bucked beautiful. It 'ud done yer eyes good." Tough Nut gave an embellished ac-

count of his interview. "But," he added, "'tain't no good. Somebody's goin' to get his pile. He's spilin' ter shake it all."

"We'll see about that. You need n't worry; just you keep me posted. What else?" Chase looked squarely at him. Tough Nut's face straightened, and he kicked holes in the needles with his heels.

"Say!" He spoke uneasily, with shifting eyes. "The Royal Flush, ye know." He looked up expectantly. He more than half thought to have Chase lay bare the whole business.

"Well, what of it? Has it gone bobtail?"

"Not's I know. Say! You hain't heard nothin'?" He looked anxious. He put no limit on Chase's power.

"No, I've heard nothing."

"Say, Billy, I wa'n't exactly on the square the other day. You knew it?" He looked anxiously at the impassive face.

Chase turned on him sharply. Tough Nut shriveled.

"What do you mean?"

"Say! 'tain't much. On the Q. T., 'tain't. It's the draft, ye know." Tough Nut spoke hurriedly, but tentatively.

"Well, what about the draft?" Chase was incisive.

"Say, Billy, they's strings on that dockymment. I did n' tell ye. I thought ye'd know." He hurriedly explained the whole business in ornate language.

"Oh, I see," laughed Chase. "You're working Tice, and Tice thinks he's working you."

"Say, now! you've corralled the whole thing, horns and tail." Tough Nut was immensely relieved. "I jest said ter mesilf," he continued, "now I did n't tell Billy the whole lay. Billy, he'll know. If he don't he'll find out, and when he does, says I, 'Tough Nut, yer in for it. Better square up.' So here I be!"

Chase laughed.

"You're all right, Tough Nut. I'll take care of myself."

"Say, now!" Tough Nut looked approvingly at Chase. "Don't I know that? The way you made us cough up about Dead Horse! The Big Swede chaws her teeth every time she hears Dead Horse. But say, Billy, about Tice?"

"Oh, go on! Tice has n't any strings on me. Skin him if you can. Only I'll give you a pointer. You'd better keep tabs on his account."

Tough Nut looked relieved, then anxious.

"Say! Lemme give you a steer — 'skuse me! — jest a — er — kind of tip, ye know." He was afraid Chase might regard him as being a little presumptuous.

"Well, let it out."

"Say, that Ingalls, ye know!" Tough Nut wriggled uneasily. "Say, Billy, yer wastin' good stuff on him." He glanced furtively, watching the effect of his words. "He's loco, clean loco, — stampeded. Headed fur cliffs; all hell can't stop

him." Tough Nut spoke with conviction. He could read print in large letters, anyway.

Chase mentally certified to Tough Nut's diagnosis; outwardly he made no sign.

"Well?" he said.

"Say! they ain't only one thing 'll stop him." Tough Nut looked cunningly suggestive.

"Well, what's that?"

Tough Nut made a playful jab with his elbow.

"Say, back-firin'. Savey?"

Chase laughed quietly.

"Perhaps."

Tough Nut's eyes kindled with desire.

"Heat her up for him. Make it hot. Run him out. Say! Me 'n the boys can do it. Do it to her Majesty's taste!"

"Not yet." Chase was weighing the possibility. He had seen men run out of a country for the country's good. But running a man out for his own good! The idea was a new one, and it rather pleased him. He chuckled gently to himself.

Tough Nut was watching him.

"Say, Billy, that's right. But it's up to you. Just speak, an' I 'll be ready."

Chase dismissed the subject.

"Where are you bound for?"

"La Sals. See how the boys's makin' out."

"On the Royal?"

"Yes. Say, really I expect to open her up any shot."

"When are you coming back?" Chase was grinning.

"Say, now!" Tough Nut looked embarrassed. "You're spittin' the fuse all right."

"If she does n't pan?" Chase's grin was incisive.

"Oh, I ain't left no vallybles with Tice. An' say! If I should n't happen back, tell Tice good-by." He grinned and the eyelid drooped.

Chase laughed heartily.

"Oh, well, pull your freight! Vamose! Get out! I'm busy."

Tough Nut rose, adjusted the bottles in his shirt, and started off. He looked back over his shoulder, as he stopped for a moment.

"Say! I'll be back all right. She ain't goin' bobtail. That's straight! S'long!" In a few seconds he had passed from sight behind the bluff. Chase had enjoined upon him that he follow the talus beyond the ranch house, anyway.

It would have been fully in accord with Tough Nut's way of looking at life for him boldly to have sought out Ingalls and to have carried his aggressive discipline to a more telling conclusion, rather for his own edification than from any desire to benefit his unwilling pupil. But he took counsel with his fears and followed the uneven trail beyond the ranch house. Having passed beyond the point of probable discovery, he descended boldly to the more open trail and thence plodded impassively on his way. He was revolving many things in his laborious mind. Again he considered the possibility of the failure of the Royal Flush to hold the

pace which the outcrop showed. Fifty ounces of gold and twenty-five per cent of copper! One thousand and fifty dollars a ton! He grinned cynically. Why, a man could dig the ore from the outcrop, pack it on his back eighty miles, and still make money at that rate, and there were three feet of it anyway!

He went over in his mind the papers he had signed. Nothing down, one hundred thousand to be paid, if the vein, on being cross-cut, held up in size and value. Tough Nut knew very well that it would not hold up to more than one half that value, even if it kept its size. If it went only a fourth, it was a bonanza, and Tough Nut knew it. He looked very thoughtful. The papers were signed. The buyers could take it or not, as they chose. They had not bonded themselves, only a conditional draft of ten thousand dollars. If the vein held up at the cross-cut, the ten thousand was his, whether they took the property or not. If it did not? Tough Nut drew a long breath. If it did not? If it proved to be worthless? His face broke up into a bewildering maze of cross wrinkles, indicating a triumphal smile. He had had a glorious time for two whole months, and old Tice would be stuck for three thousand dollars at least. Tough Nut caressed the bottles in his shirt.

"It 'ud be worth hard money to see the old skinflint squirm. Say! 'T will put mournin' on him to the day of his death."

Tough Nut's face again straightened. Suppose

the vein should only show one fourth value? He knew it would even then be worth far more than the purchase price. But the papers he had signed! Again Tough Nut's thoughts labored; again his face cleared.

"They'll take it or lave it; one hundred thousand is me price. They'll kick, if they can; but Billy Chase'll see me through, and Billy's white."

He left the regular trail and threaded his way through a tangle of bush, climbed the talus and passed under the overhanging cliff. He squeezed through a cleft in the rock and emerged into a moderate-sized cave. His cache was safe. He took from his pocket the packet of papers, wrapped them in a piece of rubber, and shoved them into a crevice, sifting dust upon them.

"The Big Swede will set me up in a drink," he grinned; "but whin she goes through me pockets, she'll pull the hell of a face."

He emerged from the cleft, picked his way down the trail and went on his course. He had taken a roll of blankets and a few articles of food. He was not far from his prospect. He knew it was late. There came a series of booming reverberations. He counted the shots: one, two, three, a long pause, then a fourth, louder and heavier.

"The boys is doin' well. There goes the lifter, an' the powder is workin'!"

The sounds were muffled and rending, telling of well-placed shots and judiciously loaded. In a few minutes he had reached a black-mouthed hole,

whence dense clouds of white smoke crawled and writhed in the moonlight. His foreman was standing just outside. He had picked up a few pieces of rock, thrown out by the blast, and was examining them critically.

"How's she looking?"

The foreman turned at Tough Nut's question.

"Ten feet more 'll open her up. The rock's softening. 'T will be a bigger vein than the outcrop."

"Tell that to them as needs it." Tough Nut drew his pipe from his pocket.

"The boys is gettin' uneasy. Big promises ain't as fillin' as poor pay."

Tough Nut again shoved his hand in his pocket and drew forth a small buckskin pouch.

"Stand 'em off," he said. "'T is worth yer time." He handed the foreman four ten dollar bills.

The man took the money.

"Make it another," he said. "They're sayin' I'm standin' in with you already."

Tough Nut handed him another bill.

"The boys is safe," he said; "Tice is good for it. I'd like to throw a big scare in him, but the boys is safe."

"Three days more 'll answer that." The foreman looked up toward the outcrop and then into the tunnel, measuring the distance.

"Perhaps ye'd like something to cheer ye?" Tough Nut drew the bottle from his shirt. "'T is

the old man's best," he said, as he handed over the bottles.

The man took the bottles with a growl.

"Tice is putting up. You stand to win on any turn. You've no call to be so damn close. Make it an even hundred."

"I'll not do me friends dirt." Tough Nut spoke loftily from a pinnacle of sudden virtue.

"Prove it, then. I've stood by you."

"Ye'll stand yet. Don't tickle me heels; I'm hell on a kick."

The foreman turned away, growling:—

"If Tice slips out, you'll need tight cover and nimble heels. The boys'll do you, sure."

Tough Nut shouldered his blankets.

"In four days I'll be back. Ye know where. If ye hit it, I'll take the gang of ye an' drown ye in whiskey. Say," he added; "don't tell the boys you've seen me."

"Sign these before you go." The foreman held out a bundle of time-checks.

Tough Nut and the foreman went to a little shop, and by the light of a candle Tough Nut laboriously affixed his signature to each. The foreman packed the checks.

"In four days. If we strike ore, shall we go through it?"

"To the foot," answered Tough Nut.

The men parted, and Tough Nut resumed his journey. It was a long, hard tramp to Moab; but that is part of a prospector's life.

It was high noon, the next day, when Tough Nut entered the shabby little town that differed not in many respects from hundreds of others located in out-of-the-way places, definite nuclei where hardened cow-punchers and errant prospectors came to let out the exuberance of long-restrained spirits by taking others in. Its principal feature was a cluster of nameless mounds wherein lay booted men, each with the manner of his taking off marked plainly upon him.

Moab was not noted for the longevity of its inhabitants nor for the stability of its population. Its permanent residents were quiet and unostentatious.

CHAPTER IX

THE BIG SWEDE

TOUGH NUT picked his ready way among the straggling buildings that reared their square-faced shields of boards in jaunty pride, hiding with pretentious fronts the empty nothingness of thin reality. Here and there were small irrigating ditches, choked with filth, their banks crusted with alkali, outlined with cottonwoods that bore above their scraggy hideousness trembling leaves of hard green; across vacant lots, wind-swept and dotted with chaparral, each with drifting sand dunes piled among their roots, and impaling on their thorns rags of yellow paper and shreds of cloth that sportive winds had brought them.

Tough Nut's step had been jaunty and confident, as became his frame of mind, as he pictured to himself the impression which his recent acquisitions would make on the Big Swede. But as he neared his destination, his manner became more and more forced. The value of the wares which he proposed to barter for the Big Swede's favor grew less and less, and long before he laid hand upon the door and thrust it open, he was thoroughly cowed. There is no end of fight in a man, when strong hands are holding apart his opponent and himself.

The strong hand on Tough Nut in this case was distance ; but propinquity was weakening its grip, and his courage was melting proportionately.

With a final spurt, he thrust open the door and walked in. There was an apologetic grin on his face, and his every muscle was flabby, ready to shrink into any conciliatory mould which prudence should dictate. His attitude was that of a conscience-smitten dog who yet hopes to avoid his master's lash by complete surrender.

His eyes were wavering on a woman of heroic size, yet so well proportioned that one was conscious only of the beauty of perfect symmetry. The exquisite purity of her complexion, the heavy coils of soft, tawny hair, proclaimed her Scandinavian origin. The face was softly oval, lighted by great eyes whose changing lights came and went like the shifting sheen on molten metal. She was fascinatingly awesome, with the subtle, supple beauty of a tiger in repose. One saw beneath the soft curves of tinted flesh the tense, hard cords that could draw in merciless strength, the soft power of eyes that could soothe or flash with the searing blight of a thunderbolt, alike to your destruction.

She was the personification of the bitter lesson perfectly learned, that men sought her for their own ends, never with benevolent purposes. She had learned the lesson and never shrank from a challenge.

Her eyes rested on Tough Nut, hard, cold, and incisive. A cynical smile of questioning contempt half revealed a set of even teeth.

"Well, what in hell do you want?" The voice was modulated in rhythmic waves.

Tough Nut, shifting uneasily, held his tattered hat in his hand. The grin was frozen, but he tried to answer jauntily.

"Jest thought I 'd come over to see ye. I've made the strike of me life." He presented his sole credential with a diminished sense of its value.

"Well, where do I come in?" There was a greedy, calculating look in her eyes.

"Listen to that now!" Tough Nut's voice was deprecating. "As if ye did n't open the door whin it plased ye."

"Have you got the stuff?"

"Not all of it."

"How much?"

"Just a snifter like."

"How much?" She looked dangerous.

"Nothing at all yet. Only a promise." Tough Nut was feeling very small. He explained about the draft, omitting no detail.

"Tice is putting up for you? Who is Tice?"

"A feller what's sellin' poor whiskey for good money, an' doin' stunts for the good of his soul." Tough Nut's eyes were caressing the bottles on the shelves.

The woman reached for a bottle and shoved a tumbler towards Tough Nut. He filled his glass, drew the back of his hand across his mouth and spat, to the end that nothing should obstruct the fierce bite of the raw liquor.

"Is he easy?" pursued the woman.

"Between the money and him there's the slack on the skin of a stone."

"Is he worth working?"

"Manzanita's a small place; but drippin' water'll fill a deep well."

The woman seemed satisfied on this point and started on a new tack.

"What's the show for a lay there?"

"A sheep that goes between brambles laves wool goin' an' comin'."

Tough Nut pointed out the situation of Manzanita, laying stress on the fact that no one could get into, or depart from, the Paradox without passing through the place. Then he added:—

"I'll give you this on the straight. If the Royal Flush pans out, it's a hot place Manzanita'll be."

The Big Swede was listening intently. Cowboys on wide ranges at twenty-five to forty dollars a month did not afford unlimited revenue. She was debating whether it would not be wise to strike out in a new field. Two hundred miners at three dollars a day would yield a larger and more certain income, to say nothing of prospectors who would swarm like jackals to a new camp.

"Who is working your claim now?"

Tough Nut, much wondering, gave her the names of his men.

She went abruptly to another tack.

"Where's Billy Chase? Do you know?"

Tough Nut looked benignly intelligent.

"You 'd never guess."

"Answer my question, or I'll give you something you won't have to guess."

"He's herding goats for a locoed tenderfoot."

"Herding goats?" She was betrayed into astonishment.

"There, now, d' ye mind what I said?"

"Partners?"

"Nary partner. Jest plain herdin'."

"Is the rancher fixed?"

"A big range, lashin's of goats, an' the prettiest woman ye iver laid eyes on — barrin' yersilf iver." Tough Nut found his enthusiasm was going too far.

There was an ominous frown on the woman's face. She spoke with suppressed passion.

"Is he training with that jade?"

"I came close to that question with him jest onc't. I'm still alive, praise Gawd!" Tough Nut spoke with strong feelings of thanksgiving.

"What's his lay?"

Tough Nut shook his head.

"Next to Gawd Almighty, I never ask Billy Chase, 'What's your lay?'" Tough Nut was an earnest liar when he considered the occasion demanded it.

"Umph!" The Big Swede looked skeptical; but she dropped that line. "Well, what's his old man loco on?"

"Mesilf, I'm thinkin'. Leastways, he's stuck

on me." Tough Nut grinned over his last interview with Ingalls.

The woman looked contemptuously at Tough Nut.

"He must be clean loco."

"Yes, an' I thought it a pity. Him spoilin' to get rid of his good stuff, an' me not help him. But Billy he said, 'Hands up;' an' what Billy says, goes."

"He stood you off?"

"He did that. If you ever doubt Billy's words, jest look at the eyes of him. I did, an' me soul's at rest. Workin' tenderfoots ain't Billy."

"Well, it's me." The woman spoke evenly.

Tough Nut lifted a hand from which two fingers were missing to the second joint.

"Gawd rist yer soul, if ye tackle Billy Chase's old man. Ye'll stip high and lively."

"What's the matter? It's none of Billy Chase's business."

"Billy Chase an' his old man's fast friends. Besides, he's good to tenderfoots. None of his business, says you? Will you recall he has a way of makin' business for himsilf? Ye'll remember Dead Horse Gulch, no doubt."

"Shut your mouth, you cackling idiot!" The woman turned visibly pale, as she looked around apprehensively.

"I'll open it for me own good an' yours, too, belike." There was a touch of defiance in his voice. He stood in awe of the Big Swede, but his

awe of her plus the distance was not equal to his fear of Chase. Being compelled to a choice, he took counsel of prudence. There was a vague suspicion in his mind that he had already gone farther than Chase would approve, hence he strove to balance his information with a warning. A wrong done an individual behind his back is not easily librated. The wrong and its reparation are apt to reach the injured party sadly out of adjustment. The two rarely come to him in company; but usually as isolated acts. Tough Nut knew very well that, if it ever suited the purposes of the Big Swede to report his words to Chase, she would not hesitate to do so, and he also knew she would have no delicate scruples in adjusting the librating weights to her own ends, if in fact she considered them relatively at all.

The woman read Tough Nut's thoughts more clearly than he did himself, and she guided herself accordingly. She had already gained enough for her purposes; she knew if she wanted more detailed information, she could get it later on. She knew that Tough Nut would be reasonably quick in putting two and two together in sequence and calling the result four. But if he had two to-day, and two to-morrow, he would not be certain to-morrow whether to-day's digits had been two or four, or in fact whether they had been anything at all. She accordingly dropped the subject entirely from her conversation with Tough Nut, but by no means from her own mind.

The love of money was the blind, all-absorbing passion of the Big Swede.

She had succeeded in her ambition farther than was generally known. Foolish young men from the East had their gilding melted into her coffers; cowboys and prospectors, miners and ranchmen, always found attractive flesh-pots among her wares, if they had the wherewithal to pay. Tradesmen and ranchmen found her a ready friend in hours of financial stress, but a cold-blooded gatherer of tolls on the day of settlement. Hence nearly every one was to a greater or less extent in her power.

The little affair of Dead Horse Gulch, of which Tough Nut had so adroitly reminded her, was a fair example of one of the methods of her resourceful mind. In the palmy days of the rich but short-lived Gulch, there came a youth with much gold, traditional ideas, and cunningness of purpose. He basked in her smiles, so long as they were apparently gratuitous, but declined to render an equivalent. Salted claims he looked at with shrewd eyes, and alluring partnerships with cold blood. But the tendon of his heel was unprotected. He had an abiding faith in his skill at cards, and so the Big Swede arranged for him a quiet little game. At first he won;—of course. Then he began to lose. Of salted claims he had much worldly wisdom, but not of salted wine-cups offered by a beautiful and sympathetic woman, nor of salted cards in the hands of the wily Tough Nut.

Tough Nut had lost caution with the confidence of success, and carelessly exposed five aces. Whereupon the tradition-trained youth, with wine buzzing in his ears, deemed that the proper time for shooting had arrived. He won two fingers from Tough Nut, but he lost his life. The guns of Tough Nut, Smutty Mike, and the Big Swede were of the same calibre, and each had empty shells. In spite of officials, who for many reasons were favorably disposed to the Big Swede and her associates, in spite of the benefit of doubts, reasonable or otherwise, a wholesale lynching would have occurred, had it not been for the cool-headed interference of Chase, who stood out for, and secured, civil proceedings. The result was a kind of ticket-of-leave arrangement which, while setting them nominally free, left a way by which action could be renewed at any time. That was the first time Chase had met the Big Swede, except in a purely business way when he had taken a lease on one of her claims.

She had begun by denying everything; much against her will, she had ended by giving him the minutest details. Had she been able to reason out the methods of his compulsion over her, she would have been his deadliest enemy. As it was, she had met her master. One by one, she had tendered to him the things which had so readily commanded others, only to be repulsed by unassumed indifference. She had come to fear him with a nameless fear. The greater his indifference, the more

strongly and superstitiously was she attracted. Had circumstances allowed her to develop a heart, she could have given this fear a name. He was as indifferent to other women as to her, so she had been without jealousy, and would not have recognized the passion by its name, had it laid hold upon her.

The careless words of Tough Nut had awakened in her this fierce passion. Money had no influence over Chase. She knew that. Therefore he was not protecting Ingalls for his own benefit. Chase had at last met a woman who was more to him than she was. Her eyes grew steely hard; underneath the curving surface of moulded flesh, the tense cords of burning hatred, merciless determination, strained to breaking. Her face was distorted with passion.

Poor, innocent Mary! Henceforth her struggle was not to be alone with conciliatory weakness, but with the unchained fury of a depraved and merciless woman.

Tough Nut, watching the writhing face and clenched hands, quaked in terror. He laid her anger at the door of his veiled defiance.

"Sure," he said apologetically, "ye'll not anger Billy Chase?"

She turned her eyes upon him. The passion receded; in its place was an unutterable contempt.

The door was thrust open. Tough Nut turned to the new-comer.

"Arrah, then, me boy! 'Tis many a long day since I've set eyes on the likes of ye!"

The new-comer returned Tough Nut's greeting. The Big Swede took two glasses and placed them with the bottle on a table by her side.

"Drink," she said. "When this is gone, there's more to come."

The men drew up to the table. Others came in one by one and joined them. The Big Swede's plans were laid. She was putting them into execution.

She went into another room where Smutty Mike was sleeping off his last night's revel. Smutty Mike, who had acquired his name from having clad himself in white duck, getting gloriously drunk, and carelessly sleeping off his potations among the charred stumps of a forest fire, had come West, hoping to live by his wits. Finding many others possessed by the same idea, and much better equipped for its execution, he had changed from a confident adventurer to a sneaking, vicious jackal, the willing tool ready for the dirtiest work.

The woman shook him roughly.

"Get up, you beast," she said.

A discordant grunt of protest was the only reply.

"Get up," she repeated. "Tough Nut's here."

He sprang upright.

"Has he brought the stuff?"

"Brought the stuff?" she repeated scornfully.
"Why don't you help yourself to it?"

"Is he sneaking? I'll get it out of him.
We're partners, we are."

Her face was still flushed. She made an impatient gesture.

"Tough Nut's men will cut the vein in four days. I want to know how it pans. If it's all right, there's money coming my way."

"Your way? Where do I come in? That interests me."

"I'll put you in all right, if you mind what I say. You've got to keep stiff legs and a tight mouth, though."

"Say, Hilda, can't you get me a drink? My mouth's as dry as a dead cottonwood."

"You'll get no more drinks to whirl your few brains till I'm through with you."

He looked sullen.

"Wake up now," she continued. "I'll put you on the way of keeping drunk to the end of your life. Are you listening?"

He nodded.

"Well, then, I'll keep Tough Nut drunk till the vein is cut. You just hike over to the Royal. Get a job, if you can, but let me know how it pans, and don't make any mistake."

"Yes; but where do I come in?"

She looked at him fiercely for a second, then changed.

"How's the Snow Flake?"

"You know; I've told you," he answered sullenly.

"Tell me again."

"Pockety as hell. You know that. I took out two thousand in two days. Did n't get another color in a month. It's no good."

"It's just the thing. It's just the claim to work on a tenderfoot."

"Yes, but where's the tenderfoot?"

"I've got him. He's rich and easy, dead easy. Is it a go?"

Mike looked up suspiciously.

"Why don't you work him?" he asked.

"I don't want the earth."

"How long since?" Mike's suspicion was growing.

"I'll look out for myself, and tell you as little as I choose. If I put you on this lay, will you do as I tell you?"

Mike thought for a moment, and then said slowly:—

"Sure thing. No dirty work, though?" he added cautiously.

"Dirty work!" She laughed scornfully.

He laughed in reply.

"All right. Go on."

"Well, then, the first thing, you go over to the Royal. If that shows all right, let me know at once. Come back here straight. Then I'll put you on."

"On what?"

"I'll tell you when you come back."

"I want a drink first."

"Not a drop till this business is over. Now travel. Don't let Tough Nut see you."

Mike got a few necessary traps together and started. The Big Swede kept her part of the contract. Tough Nut was stowed away, helpless, each morning, and slept through each day.

Early on the fourth morning Mike appeared, his eyes fairly bulging with excitement.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "She's a wonder. Four feet, and lousy with gold!"

He held out a piece of the ore to the Big Swede. She took it impassively.

"Pretty fair," she answered indifferently.

"Fair!" Mike was frantic with excitement. "It's the biggest strike ever made in this country."

The woman stood apparently looking at him, but without seeing him. Her thoughts were busy elsewhere.

"Well, what's next?" He could hardly control himself.

She turned away.

"I want you to go to Manzanita."

"What! And leave Tough Nut? We've got to settle this partnership business right now."

"I'll take care of Tough Nut. You've got to go to Manzanita." She looked at him with fierce eyes. She was not thinking of him, but he thought she was. "Stop at the Snow Flake and touch it

up a little. Then get Herbert Ingalls at Manzanita and work him." She spoke with condensed fury.

"I have n't any stuff to fix the Snow Flake. You've got to season it high for a tenderfoot."

She left the room. Returning in a few moments, she handed him a small sack.

"That's enough. Now, get along."

"Is n't this pretty rapid?" asked Mike.

"It is n't as rapid as it's going to be for a while."

Mike left the room. Outside, he swore loud and deep. Nevertheless, he shouldered his blankets. Had he been able to watch the course of the Big Swede, he would have been puzzled. He had not been gone an hour before she, too, was on the trail. She was riding a brisk-walking mule, and was headed for Manzanita, but by another route. She had planned to get to Manzanita, stake out a town site, go to Montrose, and file the necessary papers. Then she would return to Moab, pack up, and move to a town of her own. She carried out her plans completely.

The avaricious but short-sighted Tice had simply squatted on government land. He waked up one fine morning to find himself a tenant at will of the Big Swede. He blustered and threatened, but the woman only laughed. Having enjoyed his squirming for a proper time, she finally informed him that, if he would give her a written acknowledgment of her ownership, she did not care to

disturb him, and that he might possibly find it to their mutual benefit to live on amicable terms. Whereupon Tice, washing his hands in air, as was his wont, bade her a cheerful good-by. He reëntered his store with thanksgiving. She departed with chuckling, counting that she had hooked another sucker.

CHAPTER X

THE OPEN SEA

THE weekly stage carrying the mail from Placerville to Paradox halted in front of the ranch house, and Ingalls and Mary stood beside it while the driver, fumbling among many packages, at last picked out the mail and handed it to Ingalls.

"Been to town lately?" he asked.

"No," answered Ingalls. "Pretty near a week since I was there."

"Great doings over there. The whole business's been staked out for a town site. Tice's just stewin' in his own fat. The old skinflint's too tight, an' it's shut down on him. You know he just squatted on government land, and never filed no papers. 'T would have cost him five dollars, you know." The driver laughed, and then went on, "Somebody's got the tip that the Royal Flush was a big winner, and they just staked out the whole business, Tice included. Now he's got to buy his own location or git." The driver laughed long and loud.

"Who did it?" Ingalls's face expressed blank astonishment.

"Oh, a woman. She's known as the Big Swede. Folks as gets ahead of her's got to git

up early and often. Say!" He lowered his voice as he leaned confidentially towards Ingalls. "She's a dance-hall roller. Got lots of stuff, but God pity the feller she gets her claws inter! She'll make old Tice dance." He straightened up, gathering his reins. "Hope you got good news from back East, Mrs. Ingalls." He glanced up at the sun. "Well, it's time for me to be movin'." He cracked his whip and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Ingalls turned to Mary.

"What an everlasting fool I was, not to have thought of that myself!"

"Thought of what?" Mary looked up absently from her letter.

"Why, of staking out that town site. There's loads of money in that. Sure money, too."

Mary had resumed her letter.

"What do you think, Herbert? Father's been elected Professor of Biblical History in the seminary. He's resigned his charge, and is going to begin his professorship next term. Mother's so pleased over it." She looked up at him with happy eyes. "Is n't it nice?"

Ingalls was watching his feet dig impatient holes in the sand.

"Yes, great," he said absently. "Confound it all! I could kick myself over the whole ranch. Well, there's one satisfaction," he went on, "old Tice did n't get it."

"You remember Mamie Elwell?" Mary was

again reading. "She's married George Herford. She was a splendid girl, and she's got a good husband. His father has retired and given George entire charge of the store."

"Yes," answered Ingalls loftily. "He's got a great business head. He'll measure out a peck of potatoes and wash his hands and weigh out two cents' worth of peppermints for a school-girl. I can see him break one in two for even weight, just like his father. He'll make enough to get himself a respectable funeral, if he lives long enough, and does n't get so absent-minded as to put in a whole lozenge once in a while."

"That's awfully mean of you, Herbert! George was one of your best friends. Papa says he's always inquiring about you. He tells every one how well you are doing out here, and takes just as much pleasure in it as if it were himself." There was a reproachful note in her voice.

"Oh, that's all right, Molly. I did n't mean anything against George. I was just thinking of his being out here, that's all. Goodness, Molly! he would n't make as much headway as a wood-chuck in a mill-race in this country."

Mary folded up the letter and replaced it in the envelope. They had been too absorbed to notice a dusty footman who now stood before them. He made an awkward dash at his hat as he nodded to Mary. She bowed slightly in acknowledgment, and went towards the house.

Ingalls was looking at a cunningly obsequious face.

"How much farther is it to Manzanita?"

"Four miles. It's a straight trail. You can't miss it."

"Thanks, pard." The man hitched his blankets uneasily on his shoulder. "You could n't give me a little bite, could you? I can pay all right." He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a dozen nuggets. "You can take your pick for a feed."

"Where did you get these?"

The man had dropped the nuggets into Ingalls's outstretched hand, and he stood weighing them with greedy eyes.

"Oh, dug them out of my claim yesterday." The man spoke with indifference, but he eyed Ingalls nervously.

"Must be a rich one." Ingalls spoke without raising his eyes from his hand.

"Yes, pretty fair." The man was studying Ingalls's face. "That is n't all I got. Here's some more." He drew from another pocket a buckskin pouch. "Got a piece of paper?"

Ingalls took a handkerchief from his pocket.

"How'll this do?"

"All right." The man dropped his blankets, took the handkerchief and sat down. He untied his pouch and emptied its contents on the handkerchief.

Ingalls dropped on the ground and sifted the shining pieces of metal through his trembling fingers. Mike watched him furtively. There was a look of satisfied cunning on his face.

"Lord!" he muttered to himself. "He bites hard."

"Where's your claim?" asked Ingalls, still sifting the gold.

"Down in the La Sals. You've heard of the Royal Flush?"

"Oh, yes. I know where that is."

"Ever been there?"

"No. I've heard about it. Tough Nut's talking about it a little. Do you know Tough Nut?" Ingalls looked up, laughing.

Mike's face darkened.

"I'll bet I do. We're partners, leastways we were. He's played me dirt. Too damn set up since his strike to treat a fellow decent."

"That's Tough Nut all right. I know him." Ingalls spoke emphatically, still keeping his eyes on the handkerchief.

"Well, he's made a bad break, shaking me. I'd rather have the Snow Flake than a dozen Flushes. Snow Flake's my claim," he added.

"Is there much gravel?" asked Ingalls.

"Thirty feet of it, and she pans from the grass roots down."

"Any cement or pipe clay?"

"Not a bit. Say, you aren't slow on mining, yourself." Mike looked admiringly at Ingalls.

"Oh, I've caught on a little," replied Ingalls, with pleased indifference.

"I should say you had. Ain't one feller in a thousand, except an old hand, would have thought

of pipe clay and cement. Most ranchers would ride over gold and never see it."

Ingalls rose to the cast beautifully.

"Oh, well, you see I'm not dead stuck on ranching. Just took it up till I could see something else that's better. I'm keeping my eyes open, though."

"That's the stuff!" Mike spoke with hearty approbation. "If there were more level-headed fellers like you, there wouldn't be so many go broke."

"Are you working your claim steady?" asked Ingalls.

"Well, no; can't say's I am. You see, it's this way. I struck it big, first thing, and got rattled. Didn't look beyond the point of my pick. Took out two thousand dollars first two days, and then went and blew it in like a fool. When I used it up, I went back and found the water too high. I can't work it without putting in a tunnel for a tail sluice. I felt pretty sick over it; but 't was gone, and no use. So I just sniped around a little and got out this." He pointed to the handkerchief.

"What are you going to do now?" There was suppressed eagerness in the question.

"Well, it's up to this. I've got to take in a partner. It's hard luck, but it serves me right for being such a blinking fool."

"Is that what you're going to Manzanita for?"

"Sure thing. I'm going to strike Tice. I'll have to put up lively; but I guess I can fetch him, though."

"What are you going to Tice for?"

"Because I don't know any one else. Here's the lay of the land." He drew from his pocket a paper on which was a rough map. "There's the Royal Flush, and here's Boiling Creek. Then there's just a series of falls down to here. This is the Snow Flake," pointing to the map. "It's about a thousand feet lower. The cañon opens out here, and there's a big gravel bar, about four acres."

Ingalls followed eagerly the pointing finger.

"There," resumed Mike; "the cañon chokes again for about three hundred feet, and the creek falls straight into the Dolores."

"Why, the Snow Flake's a big pan, is n't it?"

"That's it exactly." Mike looked up with assumed admiration. "The Royal Flush has been worn down at least two thousand feet, and every speck of gold is in that basin."

"What show are you giving to the one that puts up?"

"I'll make it easy," Mike answered. "I'll give a half interest for three thousand dollars and enough to drive a tunnel for a tail sluice."

"How much will that cost?"

"Oh, two or three thousand more, perhaps. You see we'll have to whip-saw lumber for the sluices and then put in wing dams."

"What do you say to taking me in?" Ingalls tried to hide his eagerness.

"Why, I didn't suppose you'd go into such a scheme."

"I might, if it looks all right. I shall want to look it over first."

"Of course you will. I'll show it to you all right."

"Why don't you use your three thousand for fitting up your place for working?" Ingalls looked at Mike suspiciously.

Mike hung his head.

"That's a fair question." He looked up desperately. "You see, when I get a half dozen drinks in me, it drives me crazy. You see I borrowed three thousand on that placer, and if I don't pay up within a month, I lose the whole thing."

"Can't you get the time extended? It's a safe thing."

"That's just it. It's too damn safe, and the feller knows it." Mike groaned. "Lord! If it was n't for that high water, I'd take out the whole thing in a week, just sniping. It's no use, though. It's pay up or git."

Ingalls looked thoughtful. Mike noted the look anxiously.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "You come down there with me and look the ground over. Then, if it does n't pan out as I say, I'll give you this." He pointed to the handkerchief. "There's

good two hundred there. If it suits, and you'll go in, I'll promise to turn over every cent we take out, till you're paid back what you put in and five per cent a month. I can afford it. I'd rather give away the whole outfit than let that feller get it."

Ingalls answered deliberately, as he fingered the nuggets.

"That's a fair proposition, more than fair."

"That's all right. I'm in a hole, and the feller that helps me out is going to be treated square, if I know how."

"These nuggets came from your placer?" Ingalls looked sharply at Mike.

"If you don't pan out more like them, you can keep these."

"When do you want to start?"

"The sooner, the better. I've got to hustle. If you don't take hold, I've got to hunt up some one else."

"I guess I'll take hold all right." Ingalls rose as he spoke, holding out the nuggets to Mike.

Mike waved them away.

"Oh, give them to the missus, with my compliments. I'll bet she never saw many such, down East." He could hardly contain himself.

"I don't wonder you're up against it, if you're as generous as this. You'd better take back some of them."

Mike picked up his blankets rather slowly. He

had played his last card. He was confident, but nervous as to the result.

"Well, come in and feed," said Ingalls. "I'll start with you this afternoon; that is, if you're not too tired." He looked inquiringly at Mike.

"Oh, no, I'm rested now. Feels real good to meet a Christian in this damned country. Most fellers would have skinned me alive in this fix."

"Well, I don't want to push a man too hard. This is good enough as it is."

"You bet it is! It will surprise you, when we get it opened up." Mike thrust his tongue into his cheek and congratulated himself with an emphatic wink behind Ingalls's back.

"You'll find it cooler out here, till dinner's ready. Excuse me. I'll go in and tell my wife you'll be here to dinner." Ingalls entered the doorway, leaving Mike on the veranda.

Mary was out in the kitchen.

"Well, Molly, I've got something better than the town site. Came right into my hands, too. See that!" He held out the nuggets with trembling hand.

"What's that?" Mary hardly saw the outstretched hand. She was looking anxiously at his excited face.

"What's that!" he repeated. "It's gold,—placer gold. They're for you;—take them," he added impatiently. "I've got a half interest in the claim."

"A half interest?" she repeated dazedly.
"What claim?"

"In the Snow Flake," he answered. He explained the transaction, leaving out the conditional consideration.

"Do you mean to tell me you've gone into partnership with an entire stranger?" she asked.

"That's what I have," he answered decidedly; "but I'm going down to look the ground over first."

"Don't do it, Herbert! Don't do it!" she spoke pleadingly.

"Why, I should think I was the worst kind of tenderfoot, the way you act, Molly."

"If you're bound to go, have Mr. Chase or Peter go with you. They both are your friends, and they are experienced men. They will go, if you ask them."

"I know gold when I see it. I don't have to ask anybody that."

"If the placer is so rich, why does he want a partner?" Mary was trying another tack.

"Because he can't work it alone."

"Then why does n't he hire some one?"

"Because he's tied up." Ingalls started in eagerly; then stammeringly, "high water, you know; the snow's melting and the creek is too high to work alone." He averted his eyes as he rattled the last.

"How much are you going to give him for your half interest?"

"Confound it all! I'm not going to give him anything, unless it's all right. He's got to have some one to help him work it; can't you understand?"

"But, if it is all right, you are going to give him how much?"

"As much as I think it's worth, and as much less as I can get it."

Mary was silent for a moment, then, looking at Ingalls, she said steadily:—

"Herbert, I don't want you to have anything to do with mining. You know I don't. But if, in spite of it, you are bound to go on, I'll do all I can to help you. Have Mr. Chase or Peter go with you. If either of them says it's a good chance, I'll give up everything, and I'll never reproach you, whatever happens."

"I tell you I don't want either Chase or Peter. I know gold when I see it, just as well as they do."

"That isn't it. I don't know a thing about mining, but it seems to me as if success must depend on something more than knowing gold. Why, I know that much." She looked at him with a smile.

"Why, of course it does. It needs common sense."

"And common sense," she added, "is wide experience. Mr. Chase and Peter both have had experience."

"Umph!" Ingalls snorted. "Experience! Chase has been knocking around this country for

ten years. He's made a total failure of everything. He's got his level now, I guess, if he can stick to it. He's a first-class goat herder. Peter's been here twenty years, shooting a hole in the mountain and talking nonsense, when he can get any one to listen."

"Herbert Ingalls," — Mary's voice was indignant, — "you ought to be ashamed of yourself! I'd be ashamed to think such things."

"Oh, well!" he turned abruptly. "I'm going, and I'm going alone, too. That settles it."

In Mary there was place for no other feeling than angry resentment. Her eyes were flashing, and she strove to keep back a sharp retort. Before she felt that she could control herself, Ingalls had passed from the room.

Smutty Mike had no embarrassing scruples which would hinder him from listening to a conversation which was not meant for the public, even if the subject-matter did not concern him. In this particular instance, he had a deep personal interest in what went on between Ingalls and his wife. To this end he left the veranda and entered the dining-room. He had intended to retreat to the veranda on the first intimation that the interview was about to terminate. The abrupt return of Ingalls frustrated his plan. Ingalls would have passed through the room without observing Mike, if the latter had not spoken.

"Light's pretty strong outside. Thought I'd come in and rest my eyes a bit."

"Oh, — er — yes; guess you're right."

Mike glanced at Ingalls sharply. Evidently Ingalls had hardly understood him. Not so Mary, who followed her husband.

"I should think your eyes would have become accustomed to strong lights, living out of doors as much as you do."

Her words were as colorless as her manner of utterance, but Mike understood. He knew very well that, if he had Mary to deal with, his business would soon be done. He was, however, a quick judge of men, and he hardly needed the assurance of Ingalls's words to his wife, which he had overheard.

The dinner was a quiet one. Ingalls was restless, Mike was subduedly confident, Mary very even and quiet, though striving hard to keep from showing the shame and indignation she felt at the easy credulity of her husband.

Mike accepted a horse from Ingalls, and they rode away together; Ingalls gaining buoyancy with every step, and Mike, as became an unlucky but deserving man, artfully leading him on. Mary stood watching the receding figures till they passed from sight. She could not help contrasting the two in her mind, in spite of the fact that Mike had filled her with a loathing repugnance. He was too contemptible to merit either anger or resentment. These she reserved for her husband. We avoid a venomous reptile; we resent with anger the foolhardy daring that exposes itself to attack.

Mike had skillfully distributed the gold which

the Big Swede had given him, and with equal tact had guided Ingalls to the end that every panful of gravel which he tried, yielded rich returns. It panned, as he said it would, from the grass roots down.

"It's a pity," he finally said, "that the water's so high. This is all top dirt that you've tried. You ought to see how bed rock pans."

"This is good enough." Ingalls spoke with eager decision. "It's a go; isn't it?" His voice was anxious.

"Sure thing," answered Mike. "I'm going to make a try at bed rock." He took a long-handled shovel as he spoke, and, springing to a large boulder, he dipped the shovel into a whirling eddy. Digging the point of his shovel down to the rock, he nursed it along and then carefully raised a shovelful of gravel. "Try this, just for luck," he called.

Ingalls took the gravel in the pan and slowly washed it down. Mike bent over him with his hands resting on his knees. A few flirts, and two yellow points gleamed through the sand. Ingalls picked them out.

"Good heavens, just look at that!" The two nuggets were worth at least ten dollars.

Mike looked at them indifferently.

"That's nothing. I've taken out one-hundred-dollar nuggets, once in a while." To himself he muttered, "I'll have to strike something harder next time, if I want to keep my hand in. He's

too easy. Want to try any more?" he asked of Ingalls.

"No; I'm satisfied."

They scrambled to the level bench above. Seating themselves, they arranged the details of the transfer. Ingalls was to pay three thousand dollars cash; Mike was to transfer a half interest, as soon as he could redeem the mortgage. They were to begin the tunnel at once, Ingalls paying in addition for all labor and supplies.

It was late in the afternoon when all details were settled; but they decided to start for Manzanita at once. Ingalls's sole fear now was lest the holder of Mike's notes might have a grasp on the placer which would not be loosened by their redemption. As for Mike he had no fears at all, not even in regard to Ingalls.

CHAPTER XI

THE POTTER'S CLAY

AFTER unnumbered nights of hilarious consciousness and as many days of total oblivion, Tough Nut awoke, one afternoon, with a vague presentiment. The sun was shining hotly through a closed window, causing him to blink painfully. One arm was still thrust through the sleeve of his coat, and the other was free. The coat was bunched on one side. Tough Nut prodded the coat with inquisitive fingers.

"So now!" he said. "Ye 're the felly what's been crowdin' me. Ye were quiet like, but damned persistent; small wonder!"

He slowly worked the blankets off from him with his feet. When the feet came into view, one was bootless; the other, booted, had his trousers twisted about it. A long grin wrinkled his face.

"Good boy!" he remarked. "Ye did betther! Ye kicked the other felly out. Ye 'll come with me, belike."

His eyes wandered around the room and finally rested on the missing boot. He rose and struggled into his trousers and coat.

"Come on," he said, picking up the other boot

and putting it on ; " the fun is over. 'T is a steady chune fer a long jig I'll be playin' ye ! "

He took his hat from the bedpost. The hat had not been deposited lightly and the post had been thrust through it. Tough Nut eyed it, then placed it on his head.

" It's poor shelter, but damned good air me head will travel under."

He went forth into the empty bar-room. His shuffling steps attracted attention. A door was opened, and a disheveled-looking girl entered the room.

" Good-mornin', me bonnie ! " Tough Nut grinned amiably.

" 'Tain't mornin' ; it's afternoon, and late at that ! "

" It's damned smart ye are about things that don't matter. If ye'd use yer wit for yer own benefit, belike ye would n't be havin' yer head tied oop with a dirty rag, tryin' to squeeze the ache of bad whiskey out of it. To raysume," added Tough Nut argumentatively, " mornin's the beginnin' of the day."

" Well, three o'clock ain't the beginnin' of the day."

" So ? It's the beginnin' of the day fer me, an' so I axed ye good-mornin'. Not that I care a damn, only likin' to be civil."

" Yer days an' yer civility are a good bit alike." The girl turned to leave the room, but Tough Nut reached out a detaining hand.

"If yer looks an' yer temper are a fair sample, ye'll live to a ripe old age."

"I don't want any ripe old age in mine."

"Ye'll git it. 'T is the good die young! Say!"
Tough Nut went on; "where's Hilda?"

"She's gone."

"Where's she gone?"

"I don't know, and I care less."

"When did she go?"

"The mornin' two days since." The girl looked up, grinning defiantly as she recited volubly the story of the Big Swede's conferences with Smutty Mike, his two days of absence, his return, and the hasty departure of both. Tough Nut looked thoughtful, with downcast eyes.

"The Big Swede? Flewed the coop! Smutty Mike? Flewed the coop! Tough Nut? Ye damned fool, dead drunk and hell a-poppin'! 'T is time ye flewed the coop, too. Be aff wid ye!"

He slung his blankets over his shoulder and the door closed behind him. He laid a straight course for the Royal Flush.

Tough Nut cudgeled his wits, trying to thresh therefrom the animus of the Big Swede's moves, and Smutty Mike's; but in vain. The obvious interpretation was that Smutty Mike had learned that the Royal Flush had opened up big. This pleased him immensely, and he knew that the Big Swede had elaborated some scheme which would inure to her benefit. But in what way?

Tough Nut laid the up and down miles behind

him, as he followed the winding trail over hills and mountains and across deep gulches ; but no light could he gain, even after much thinking. His title to the Royal Flush was perfect. Chase had given him careful instructions as to posting and recording his claim, so he dismissed his fears on that score, especially as he thought of Chase's promise to stand by him. The thought of the Manzanita town site never entered his head. He even thought of his careless words in reference to Ingalls and his wife, but that the Big Swede contemplated any decided move against them he dismissed as wholly improbable. Ingalls was too small game. Not that the Big Swede was above plucking small game as well as big ; but there was Chase's warning, which he had transmitted with no emphasis left out. Tough Nut had yet to learn that in a woman is an emotion beside which fear is a thing to be laughed to scorn.

Tough Nut was sharp. Some things he knew well. Among these, he knew his limitations, and he never dulled his wits by trying their edge on things too hard for them. A bad bridge worried over is crossed twice, and Tough Nut dismissed vague possibilities and gave himself up to the contemplation of definite realities. From long experience, he knew that the boys would regard him very differently, now that his claim had been proved and that their pay was sure. Though fortune had played him many scurvy tricks in his mottled, wandering life, he knew well the deference that was due a successful strike, and he had no scruples in

exacting the obsequious tribute of others to the uttermost farthing. Occupied with these pleasanter thoughts, the miles and hours slipped behind, unconsciously on his part, and the sun was just reaching down to the mouth of the tunnel from over the shading mountain as Tough Nut appeared on the opposite side of the gulch. The sight that met his eyes was all that he had unconsciously prayed for. The boys with their foreman were seated on the edge of the dump, and from the lips of each, lazy films of soothing smoke were wreathed from meditative pipes. On this peaceful scene Tough Nut descended with the frenzied wrath of a she-bear spoiled of her cubs.

"Good-mornin', Tough Nut! Ye've struck it rich!" The foreman advanced, with a heavy piece of ore in his outstretched hand.

Tough Nut straightened up. Every stubble on his unshaven face stood out stiffly, and through his crownless hat tufts of rigid hair supported flaps of limp felt.

"Tough Nut! Tough Nut, is it? Where's yer manners to yer soopayriors? 'Tis Misther McCarthy 't will inthrojuce himsilf to ye."

The grin on the foreman's face died away, and a sullen look took its place.

"'Tis twenty minutes to tally, Mr. McCarthy." He laid cutting emphasis on the last.

"Tally! Tally! is it? This is the way ye are lookin' afther the int'rest of yer impl'yers, is it? Tally is it, says ye! Yer countin' the minutes, an'

me tellin' ye good dollars ! Mike Flannagan ! Spit on your fists, an' lay hold on the barry ! Jim Boyle ! The shovels 'll not bite ! Be the rust av thim, 't is long since their noses have scraped on the rocks. Tom Walsh ! You an' thim bow-legged pants forninst ye, lay hold of the drills ! Step lively an' often now. Tally, is it ? I 'll larn ye who's boss ! ”

Tough Nut unslung the blankets and kicked them towards the foreman. The latter picked them up in a half-dazed manner and started for the bunk-house. Tough Nut watched, as the last man whisked into the tunnel, listened to the rumble of the wheelbarrow, and, later, to the rhythmic clink of smiting hammers, as measured blows drove the steel into the rock. Then he turned and strode towards the bunk-house, where savory smells emanated from sizzling eggs and steaming coffee.

Tough Nut seated himself. Not a word did he speak. His hunger, ravenous as it was after a four days' spree, began to fade, but his recently acquired dignity waxed lean. Behold the vanity of worldly wisdom ! We rail at the poor, weak body, and burn incense under the nose of intellect. But the flesh knows when satiety is reached, and quits ! The hunger of the soul grows stronger and more insistent with every morsel thrust into its ravenous maw.

Tough Nut rose from the table and turned to the foreman.

“ I 'll slape till one o'clock ; thin have me din-

ner ready. I'll lave ye thin. Knock off at three and meet me at Paradox at five sharp. I'll not wait for ye; me time is vallyble. A gintleman is as good as his word. To-morry I'll drown ye in Tice's best."

Tough Nut's idea of making rendezvous at Paradox instead of going with the party from the Royal Flush was a very simple one. He wished to keep his cache a secret, and it was necessary to get his papers ready for the actual transfer which he knew would not long be postponed. He was expecting a hilarious time, but he trusted to keep control of himself through the expected orgy, and the feeling of necessity for so doing would be a powerful aid. He found his papers, carefully placed them in his pocket, and after waiting a short time on the trail to Paradox, he was joined by the foreman and the boys, and they proceeded without further delay to Manzanita.

The definite news of the big strike had spread far and wide, as only news can spread through the restless, shifting population of mining camps. Tough Nut and his party found a welcoming and hilarious crowd gathered around Tice's door.

Ouray, Red Mountain, Telluride, and Rico, these were the neighboring camps of the San Juan, and from these places had come many with whom Tough Nut was already acquainted. With their entire worldly possessions, consisting of the scanty clothes they wore and the roll of blankets, with pick and shovel, on their backs, they tramped across

the dusty mesa, and were pausing for a final carouse at the narrow gateway of the La Sals.

A goodly number of patient burros, laden with the camping outfits of the more forehanded prospectors, were wandering dejectedly about the dusty street or scattered among the hot sand dunes, cropping at cactus and nibbling at brittle tufts of dried buffalo grass. Oblivious alike of their past ills and of their hopeless future, they endured with resentless indifference the kicks of their masters, and munched their scanty fare, seemingly because it required less effort to prolong a miserable existence than it did to lie down and die.

No one in the noisy crowd knew the name nor the place of birth of the other. These identifying vouchers had been cast aside to give place to more telling cognomens. "One-eyed Pete" and "Specimen Bill" stood for what they called for, whereas Peter Milligan, born in county Cork and hailing from Boston, or William Dean, of an old New York family, meant nothing at all. Pete had lost an eye in a bar-room fight, but had done his man, and was thus counted as one well worth the trouble to have with you in a row; Specimen Bill had no superior in luring good dollars from guileless tenderfoots in exchange for an interest in worthless claims of which "I have a specimen in my pocket, from it you can see for yourselves."

There were young men and old among them. Some had made a lucky strike, but had blown it in on the wheel or in a protracted revel; others had

lived, and were still living, with hopes so strong as to take the place of certainty, hopes strengthened, not weakened, by being long deferred ; no thought or care that the natural limit of their lives would soon end the pleasures of wealth, even should it be acquired.

The seed that falls on shallow ground springs into life with the thoughtless vigor of the plant rooted deep in moist, rich earth. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die." To-morrow, One-eyed Pete may rest, with a knife between his ribs, under a drifting mound of desert sand ; Specimen Bill, a huddled heap of white and broken bones, at the foot of a cliff ; but these *memento mori* will be unheeded by those who pass them by. In the eyes of the passers the light will shine, and in the blood the fever will still burn. The unbridled lust for gold, with its cognate vices, strides forth, embodied in angular age and rounded youth ; wifeless, childless, friendless, and the hand of death seeks them out one by one. It whitens the world's deserts with their bones, dots far-off mountains with nameless graves, or rolls them to shapeless atoms in the sweep of torrents.

There is blood on dainty rings of gleaming gold ; it tinges the flash of diamonds ; it stains the food we eat. Around the banquet table flit noiseless ghosts, wandering from unsepulchred bodies, from slaughtered kine and songful bird, from dying flowers and the crushed fruit of sunny vines ; the unseen soil from which springs wit and beauty and

wisdom. The hand that digs and the hand that slays, supports it all.

It is the sweetest lily that thrusts its roots deepest in stinking mud.

Which is the potter? The mud, or the lily?

Tice was pouring propitiatory oblations before his offended penates, and poor whiskey into the glasses of thirsty revelers; and Tough Nut, the irrepressible, was standing treat and pouring oblations to whom it might concern, providing objections were not raised against their first going by way of his throat. Thick-voiced jests mingled with snatches of songs and clink of toasting glasses held in unsteady hands and watched by lurching eyes. There was a discordant cry:—

“Tough Nut! Tough Nut! Give us a song! He’s the boy! Keep still!”

A few of the steadier thrust their way to the grinning Tough Nut and lifted him upon a table. Unaffected physically by his numerous drinks, save as to flushed cheeks and tireless grins, he stood with half-raised glass, his crownless hat pushed back from his perspiring forehead. He jerked the liquor down his throat, noting, as he did so, the pious Tice filling a glass from a bottle in his hands. There was a quick jerk, the glass flew from Tough Nut’s hand and crashed against the bottle Tice was holding. Tice’s face flushed hotly, as he looked ruefully at the broken bottle and the spilled liquor.

"Tice, ye divle!" called Tough Nut; "where's yer manners? An' me about to sing for me friends."

More glasses would have followed Tough Nut's, had he not thrown back his head and begun roaring forth in raucous tones a ditty which always roused the enthusiasm of miner or prospector. It was a conventional ditty. It spoke feelingly of the existing amity between cowboy and miner, an amity only equaled by the proverbial fraternity of little birds in their little nests. They agreed, when one was pitched out, or dead, or both.

The cowboy came to the miner's town,
"The devil knows where," says he;
With his hat stuck up and his whiskers down,
"I'm a hell of a man," says he.

He held the barkeep up for the drinks,
He swallowed his whiskey down;
"Me pot is full, and me brush is stiff,"
Says he: "I'll paint the town."

He shoved his guns at the barkeep's nose;
He shaved his face with his knife.
"Yer growin' moss on the skin of yer back,
I'll give yer the time of yer life."

But the barkeep once was a miner boy,
He'd handled a single jack.
He ups with his fist and gives it a twist,
And the bad man lay on his back.

He spiked his guns and he broke his head,
And he jumped on him up and down;
"I'm a hell of a man, meself," says he;
"I've a paint-pot full of me own."

Chase entered just as Tough Nut began his song, but Tough Nut's back was half turned towards him, and he was unnoticed. As Tough Nut bel-
lowed forth the last lines, he turned full towards the open door and caught sight of the clean-cut, impassive face.

"Lave me be, Billy Chase! I'm raisin' hell an' fillin' Tice's pockets. Small thanks ye'll get from him for interruptin'."

"Mr. Chase is always welcome," smirked Tice.

"Hold yer hush!" growled Tough Nut; "or I'll go from yer bottles to yer head."

"Choke it off, Tough Nut!" Chase spoke laughingly. "You'll need all your wits in a few days."

"Words of wisdom don't kape well in a belly full of bad whiskey, Billy Chase; I'm wasting me breath tellin' ye that."

"Listen hard, Tough Nut. I've just heard from Freeman. He'll be here in a few days. If you can't keep sober long enough to attend to business, you can go it alone."

"Don't go back on me, Billy Chase. I've struck it big, an' I promised the boys the drunk of their lives. They've had it, I'm thinkin'," as he glanced at the recumbent figures scattered about. "Tice, be the singin' nose av ye, is me bed ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then look to it that no one but Billy Chase disturbs me. I'll break the head of the first man

that knocks at me dure, an' yours afther, for lavin' him the chanst."

Without a word more, he walked through the door which opened into a lean-to, turned the key, and was soon in a deep sleep.

Chase watched him till the door closed and he heard the click of the lock, then he turned and walked out. As he stepped from the door, he caught sight of the figure of Ingalls, as it hurriedly disappeared around the building. Following close at his heels was Smutty Mike.

His first impulse was to follow them, and have it out then and there. A second thought convinced him that it was better to wait. His power over Mike would not weaken; over Ingalls it would be greater when time and circumstances had shown him he was being worked.

CHAPTER XII

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

MIKE was the first to notice Chase, and he stopped suddenly. Ingalls, turning sharply, followed Mike's eyes, and he too saw Chase coming from Tice's door. Their purpose, animated by different motives, was the same. To this end, they turned abruptly between two buildings that faced the street. If Ingalls was surprised at Mike's evident wish to avoid a meeting with Chase, Mike was equally so at the action of Ingalls.

While Ingalls was completely in the dark in regard to Mike's fears, Mike ventured a shrewd guess to himself as to the motives of his companion. The Big Swede had not informed him that Ingalls was a protégé of Chase. She was too shrewd for that. Some time it might be for her advantage to deny all knowledge of Mike's operations. Mike, of course, had found out that Chase was herding goats for Ingalls. From Ingalls's conduct he judged that Chase had been administering some wholesome advice, and that Ingalls was acting independently of it, relying upon his own judgment. The thought of this judgment brought a broad smile to Mike's face.

Chase's mental pause did not affect his motions.

With eyes straight ahead, he walked rapidly to his pony and rode away to Dry Creek.

Mike was the first to speak.

"Well, to get down to business, the sooner you raise the dust and get things settled, the sooner we can begin work. You say you have n't got the 'ready.' Suppose you hit up Tice."

Mike had no desire that Tice should lend Ingalls the money, and he had little doubt but that he would refuse the request. He could assign no particular reason for thinking so; he did not even try. He knew that, for some reason, the Big Swede was interested in breaking Ingalls, and he felt sure that she would see to it that it was done.

"I hate to go to that old hypocrite for accommodation," answered Ingalls. "It's a pity there's no bank handy."

"Just wait till the Snow Flake opens up; you can start a bank of your own."

"That's looking ahead all right." Ingalls laughed a little uneasily.

He had never borrowed money before, and it hurt his pride even to think of it. The allurements of the Snow Flake grew slightly hazed in the presence of a disagreeable necessity. A momentary vision of the pleading face of his wife came before him, and a feeling of the loneliness of his position filled him with a strange depression. What if he were wrong, after all?

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell Mike flatly that he had changed his mind, that he would

drop the whole business. But an easier way suggested itself to him. Tice he knew would make him pay roundly for any favors. He could refuse his terms, and back out from his agreement with Mike on that score. It was not an open and manly course; but it did not matter, it would amount to the same thing in the end. A distant bridge is proverbially dangerous and terrifying. But if necessity throws it across one's path, the sooner it is crossed the better. A roundabout path, in the attempt to avoid a disagreeable duty, often entails additional discomforts.

Mike was anxiously studying Ingalls's face. Ingalls was dead easy. Clay is a very plastic body, but the wise man never builds on it as a foundation. Mike moved away. Looking over his shoulder, he said: —

“Well, you touch up Tice. I'll see you in an hour or so.”

Ingalls turned irresolutely and entered Tice's store. He looked disgustedly at the signs of the recent carousal.

“I've come to see you on a matter of business.”

“Yes, Mr. Ingalls. What can I do for you? Suppose we go into the store. Since the discovery of Tough Nut, I keep my store and — er — my other business in separate buildings.”

A covered alley separated the two. A door opened on the side of the saloon and another across the narrow alley into the store proper. In spite of Tice's professed repugnance to retailing liquor,

he always attended to it himself, as it was a difficult matter to keep an exact check on the glasses retailed. A clerk attended to the other side.

As he entered the store, he sent his clerk across to the saloon. He motioned Ingalls to a seat, taking another chair for himself. Turning his watery eyes and mumbling mouth towards Ingalls, he waited patiently for him to state his business.

"How are you off for ready money, Mr. Tice?" Ingalls forced himself sharply to the point.

"Oh — er — do you need some money?"

"Yes; that is, I may."

"About how much?"

"Three thousand at once, and as much more — probably in about two months."

Tice's jaw waggled in bewildered astonishment.

"Six thousand dollars, Mr. Ingalls! That's a whole lot of money, — a whole lot!" He slowly shook his head from side to side.

Ingalls watched him impatiently.

"Well, it's up to you," he answered sharply.

"Times is pretty hard, Mr. Ingalls — pretty hard. Folks think I'm making money, but I ain't. Not much! You see, freight's terrible — terrible. I paid five hundred dollars for hauling my last lot of goods. I was hard pushed to get along till I began to — er — deal in liquor. I had to do it, Mr. Ingalls — had to do it. I don't like it; but I had to do it. I've got to make a living." He looked meekly apologetic towards Ingalls.

"I'm not inquiring about your business," an-

swered Ingalls. "Can you let me have the money?"

"Then, too," Tice rambled on, but his wits were busy, "this — er — ungodly woman! I have to pay rent to her for my own property, — my own property, sir!"

Ingalls rose impatiently.

"I don't care a damn about your ungodly women and rents. I have n't any time to waste."

Tice put out a detaining hand.

"I can borrow the money for you, Mr. Ingalls. I can borrow from the bank at Montrose or Ouray. How much interest do you pay?"

"As little as I can." Ingalls paused, with his hand on the chair.

"I shall have to take all the risk, Mr. Ingalls. The bank will charge me two and a half a month. Suppose I ask you the same for insurance; that will make five per cent. a month. That will be fair, won't it?"

"Perfectly fair, if you find any one fool enough to give it." Ingalls turned and strode towards the door.

In a sense he was relieved over Tice's terms, but he burned with indignation at the thought that Tice had looked upon his desire as a necessity of which advantage could be taken.

Tice was both surprised and alarmed to see Ingalls leaving so abruptly. He had far more than the six thousand dollars for which Ingalls had asked. It was lying idle because he had seen no

safe investment. Two and a half per cent. a month was the regular bank charge, as he had stated; but he had calculated on getting five for it by the subterfuge he had used with Ingalls. From Ingalls he knew that he could get good security, and he had calculated that in the end the security would be forfeited. He felt that he had overreached himself, and he tried to call Ingalls back, but he was gone.

As Ingalls left the store, he walked plump into Mike. The meeting seemed accidental, but it was a carefully planned accident on Mike's part.

"How'd you make it?" Mike was sharply eyeing Ingalls.

"First-rate," answered Ingalls shortly. "I got out of his claws without a scratch. I'm not so hard up as he thought I was."

Mike felt easier. The course was an open one now. He had held a brief consultation with the Big Swede, and he was ready for the next move.

"Let's go over to the new lay-out," he suggested, "and get something to eat. I'm hungry. We can talk things over while we're eating."

Without verbally consenting, Ingalls followed Mike across the way. They entered a large canvas tent with a board floor. There was the usual gaudy bar. On one side were numerous small tables, used indiscriminately for eating or drinking. Across the back of the room a canvas screen was stretched. What was going on behind this could be guessed from the clicking of many chips

and the low-voiced exclamations, as dealers called out winning cards and numbers.

Ingalls, hardly noting his surroundings, placidly seated himself in a chair by Mike and began drumming listlessly on the table. His attention was aroused by the rustling of a gown, and before he could command his senses, a delicate hand was extended to him and a musical voice said:—

“Mr. Ingalls, I am sure. My name is Hilda Bergstrom. I am glad to meet you.”

Ingalls was too surprised to speak. She took a vacant chair at the table, and went on:—

“This is all only for the present. I shall soon have a better place to welcome my friends.” She smiled apologetically at Ingalls, and let her eyes wander around the room.

“I’m sure the place is good enough as it is. Better than you find in most towns out here.” He could not keep his eyes from the mobile face, nor conceal his admiration.

Mike made an excellent foil. From his conduct no one would have suspected that his absence from Ingalls had been spent in close conference with the Big Swede, during which time she had plotted out to the minutest detail the scene which was now being enacted for the benefit of Ingalls. To tell the truth, Mike was surprised at the earnestness with which the Big Swede elaborated the scheme, and the interest she manifested in carrying it out. Mike could not tell whether her conduct was influenced by a real liking for Ingalls, or whether it

was a magnificent piece of acting. Certain it was that her courteous toleration of Mike was in sharp contrast to the really charming deference which she was delicately tendering Ingalls. Whatever was the animus, Ingalls fell a ready victim to her wiles. Her dazzling beauty broke down every barrier of prejudice which early training had erected, and left him exposed at any point she chose to attack.

Her keen, incisive wit, flashing mercilessly here and there, its point lowered only when turned toward his guard, laid him completely at her feet. He was stimulated to his best. He forgot what she was, what he knew her to be, and drank to the last drop the subtle wine she held to his lips.

Ingalls was not alone in his surprise. The Big Swede had pictured to herself a witless oaf, who, perchance, had run athwart her path, and whom it was necessary to remove. Instead, she found a gentleman such as she had rarely met. It was not entirely, nor indeed largely, a giving on her part. Scant as had been her opportunities for the gratification of her finer instincts, they were neither wanting nor dead. Not that her obvious mistake had in the least changed her purpose; the task was only pleasanter than she had anticipated. At the same time, she had a growing consciousness that it would be a more difficult one. She had no doubt but that she would win in the end. Without conscious analysis, she had gauged her victim,

to the end that he could be led through his vanity, where he would resist to the death any attempt at coercion. She further thought that, by playing with Ingalls, she could arouse in Chase a consciousness of herself which thus far she had failed to compass.

Mike arose from the table rather awkwardly and went towards the bar to meet a man who had just entered. A furtive glance at the Big Swede showed his absolute bewilderment at her conduct. There was an indecisive hesitancy in his movements that plainly asked for guidance; but the woman noted it with utter indifference. As for Ingalls, he was too absorbed to notice anything at all.

"What's up?" The new-comer glanced from the table to Mike.

"Damned if I know. Looks as if the game had turned, as if the dummy was playing Hilda," Mike answered in a swift aside.

"Have you got the stuff? Here are the papers." He handed an envelope to Mike.

Mike opened the envelope and ostentatiously read the papers.

"They're all here, right enough. You're going to hold me to it?"

"You bet I am!" There was a decided snap to the man's jaws.

"What's the use of being so hard on a fellow? I was half drunk when I made over the Snow Flake. I can prove that, and you know what that

means when you come to a show-down." Mike glanced cunningly at his creditor.

"Going to law it, are you? All right, Mikey, my boy." The man's voice rose. "But just let me tell you one thing. You'll find it the most expensive law business you ever tackled, and that's no dream."

"Who said anything about law?"

"That's what you meant, all right. I give you fair warning, that kind of business don't go." There was a convincing earnestness in voice and manner.

"I'm not going to law." Mike's voice was sullen. "I'll get the money all right; just give me time."

"I gave you all you asked for,—time and money, too. If the Snow Flake had n't panned, I'd have been stuck, and I would n't have kicked, either. It was a square deal, and you know it."

"Then you'll hold me up hard?" Mike placed the envelope in the open hand.

"That's it. You're called. Pay up or leave the game." The man thrust the envelope in his pocket.

"What's the matter, Mike?" The Big Swede rose and went toward the two men.

"Nothing much. This feller's got me cinched; that's all." Mike briefly recited the story of the mortgaged Snow Flake.

"May I see the papers?" She turned smilingly, with outstretched hand.

Again the envelope was forthcoming. She glanced over the papers with a feigned look of perplexity, then turned to Mike.

"You owe three thousand dollars on this?" She held out the record.

"That's the size of it."

"Why don't you pay up?" She spoke with charming distinctness.

"Have n't got the stuff," Mike answered with the assurance of a well-learned lesson.

"If I pay this note, will you make the papers over to me?"

Mike's look of blank astonishment was unmistakable. Which way was he expected to answer? Her next question gave him the clue.

"I've got a little money to put up. Is the claim all right?"

"Sure thing."

"Who knows about it? I'm not going to take your word."

Mike was feeling surefooted. Before answering, though, he gave his head a slight nod towards Ingalls, then, after a pause and seeing no objection from her, he went on:—

"Mr. Ingalls has just got back from there."

"Mr. Ingalls!" There was surprise in the exclamation. She turned and went towards the table where Ingalls was still seated.

She dropped into a chair beside him, with her back towards the two men.

"Mike says you've just come from his claim,

and can tell me all about it ; the Snow Flake, you know." She smiled at him with a look bespeaking her own ignorance and complete trust in his judgment.

"Yes ; Mike got me to look at it. You see, he's in trouble, and he came to me to help him out. The claim's all right, if I'm not mistaken."

"I don't believe that's possible." The bare words would have been too fulsome, but the smiling offer smoothed away their grossness, leaving them as delicately grateful as a veiled compliment.

Before Ingalls could reply, she went on : —

"You see, I have a little money to invest. I prefer putting it in a good prospect ; it pays better than anything else. I was thinking of taking up this note ; but it seems you have the first chance."

"I'll surrender my claim to you."

"That's too much to ask. But" — She hesitated, then looked soberly but questioningly at Ingalls ; "perhaps there is another way. What do you say to going in with me on this ? There may other things come up besides. You see, I can't get around as a man can, and — well — I would n't know any more about a prospect, if I could."

Ingalls flushed, then hesitatingly : —

"You see, I really have n't the ready money to put in. I was thinking of borrowing."

"Oh, is that all ? I was afraid it might be something else." She glanced at him with half-veiled eyes. "If you will let me in with you, I'll

advance the money. We can arrange terms later on."

Ingalls's half-formed resolution was scattered to the corners of the earth. His decision was ill-judged, foolish, and hasty. But such conduct is very, very old. Two thousand years ago, so it is recorded, a righteous mob was invited to take counsel with itself lest the stones they were about to cast should fall upon their own heads.

The Big Swede left the room. Returning in a few moments, she beckoned the two men. They came at her bidding.

"Mr. Ingalls and I have decided to redeem your mortgage, Mike." She handed him a bag of coin and the papers. "Get the note canceled and make over a half-interest to my partner and me."

Ingalls was hardly out of the shadow of the building before both coin and papers were in the Big Swede's hands. In addition, she held a note in Ingalls's name which recited that Herbert Ingalls and Hilda Bergstrom were jointly and severally liable for the full amount thereof, both principal and interest. In addition, the flocks on the Ingalls ranch had a covering which they never grew, being known in legal parlance as a blanket mortgage.

It may be well to state in passing, lest one lose sight of Hilda Bergstrom's mental acumen, as did Ingalls in the presence of her physical charms, that one of the stipulations of the note was that it should bear interest at five per cent. a month.

"We'll push that placer," was her comment. "You won't pay interest for more than a month or two. I can trust you for that. You see," she added smilingly, "that's not so bad as it seems. You'll work hard to stop interest for yourself, and the sooner the placer begins to pay, the better it will suit me."

The wiles of woman and the folly of man are as old as the story of Samson and Delilah. The foolishness of men is often buried in their insignificance or overshadowed by great success. What man, if he could, would dare to review every act or word or thought of his life? We only keep alive our reverence for the great ones of the earth by persistently shutting our eyes to their many weaknesses. Besides, this also is true. Don Quixote is not the only one who has mistaken a barber's basin for a warrior's helmet.

Ingalls had been shocked into burning indignation by the coarse, clumsy proposition of Tice, but had yielded eagerly to the Big Swede the very point which, hardly an hour before, he had declared only a driveling fool would yield. It was not the end itself, after all, that had disturbed Ingalls: it was only the manner of compassing it. There is more than we sometimes think in grace before meat. The Big Swede's desire was no greater than that of Tice; but the Big Swede knew human nature and Tice did not.

Had any disquieting twinges visited Ingalls's mind at the bald statement of a plain truth that

he had accepted financial assistance from a woman of the world, he could have defended himself very readily and abundantly from hundreds of other similar cases in the West. But the idea of self-defense was the very last thing that disturbed Ingalls. He simply assumed that, because he did not want the fact generally known, it would not be, and consequently there would be no necessity for defense.

The home-coming of Ingalls was pleasanter than his departure would have logically foreshadowed. Mary had striven with her problem; but had laid it aside, unsolved. Ingalls had no problem, only a determination to do as he wished, with as little unpleasantness as possible. Mary was vaguely conscious of a possible wrong. Ingalls was actively conscious of an actual one. Each tried to atone to the other. But the unseen fact remained. Each had taken the initial step in divergent paths.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TROUBLED DREAM

AFTER the meeting at Manzanita, the days were full of activity on the part of Ingalls and his associates. Ingalls was impatient to start immediately for the Snow Flake, but Mike's anxiety, for reasons unaccountable to Ingalls, waned as his own waxed stronger. He spent most of his time at Manzanita, getting together necessary tools and supplies, and last of all a pack-train to take them to the ground. Mike's last excuse was that his friend who was to aid him in driving the tunnel had been unavoidably detained and that it would be a whole week before he could be expected. Ingalls, who had lived in hopes from day to day as best he might, could not persuade himself to face a whole week of enforced idleness; and so he agreed with Mike that he should wait for his friend, while he himself accompanied the pack-train to the Snow Flake, put up a shack, and arranged generally so that no farther delay should ensue.

And so it happened that, early the following morning, Ingalls arose and helped the packer to get his train in order. Mike did not show himself, and Ingalls made no effort to see him. When everything was ready, he started with his train for

the La Sals. At the trail leading to the herder's cabin, he left the pack to go on, while he went to see Chase. He found him saddling up to ride out on the range.

Nothing is easy in this world, even going downhill; and the moral coward who shirks a disagreeable duty in desperate impatience finds it intensified and waiting for him around the corner he has turned. Ingalls knew and felt that, if he chose to go into any kind of wild-cat venture, it was really none of Chase's business; at the same time, he was thinking of all sorts of things to say in order to make manifest the lack of self-consciousness which he did not possess. He did not recognize his state of mind, but was simply bearing witness to the fact that he had acted like a sanctified idiot.

Chase was the first to speak. A glance told him Ingalls's state of mind, and he did not feel inclined to make it easy for him.

"Well," he said; "what have you got to say for yourself?"

The innocent words were as disconcerting as they were intended to be; but the open-faced smile which accompanied them forbade offense.

"I was n't thinking of saying anything for myself." The statement was a long way from the truth, but it was made with an assurance from which defiance was not wholly absent.

Chase was really pleased with the parry, but it left him where he started. He dropped his former point.

"Going home?"

"No; I'm going down to the La Sals. Going to be down there for a week, anyway. Hurley's wife's going to stay at our place for a month or so, while her husband is in Denver. I came over to ask if you would n't look after things at the house a little."

"Sure thing. Going on a prospecting trip?"

"Ye-es." Ingalls hesitated, then compromised. "Going to look over a claim down there, the Snow Flake. Ever heard of it?"

"Oh, yes. Are n't many claims there I have n't heard of, more or less."

Ingalls drew the reins slowly through his fingers. He wanted Chase to venture an opinion without being directly asked; but Chase had no such intention. Ingalls straightened up decidedly, hoping to force an expression where invitation had failed.

"Well," he went on reluctantly, "I must be moving. Much obliged to you. I've left things all right, I think, but they'll be glad to see you any time. So long!" And he rode away.

The interview was brief and in a measure unsatisfactory to Chase as well as to Ingalls. Ingalls was prepared to act on the defensive if attacked, but was in hopes to get a favorable opinion of his venture in the Snow Flake. This would have elated him; but an adverse one, while it might have made him anxious, would not have diverted him from his purpose. Advice or unfavorable

comment on his action would only have aroused resentment.

On the other hand, Chase, knowing or at least convinced that Ingalls had been gathered in by Smutty Mike, was in hopes that Ingalls would give him an opening even indirectly, whereby he could make suggestions born of his long experience, which would be valuable to him whether the venture turned out better or worse than was expected. As it was, Ingalls showed very plainly that any interference which went counter to his expectations would antagonize him and put farther away the possibility of his being of service in the end that Chase felt sure was bound to come. And so Ingalls rode away in his obstinate pursuit of the hopeless, and Chase, mounting, rode to his goats and to the waiting, the hardest test of all that is put upon the zeal of new-born motives, which longs for nothing so much as immediate action.

Ingalls, having aided the packer to unload his train, sent him back to Manzanita, while he himself remained to put the camp in order for the expected arrival of Mike and his assistant. He labored with restrained impatience at his task. His only recreation, if such it could be called, was, at the close of the day, to take his pan and try the gravel, hoping to catch a nugget or at least a good showing which should stimulate his courage for his monotonous task. But as day succeeded day, and his pannings, carried on as long as the waning light made it possible, showed blanks or only an

occasional color, he grew desperate. He tried to recall the exact localities where he had had such good results when Mike was present, but in vain.

Ten days had passed. The camp was fitted up as completely as possible, and still no sign or word from Mike. Every muscle in Ingalls's body was sore from his unaccustomed toil. Panning is never easy work; but when the panner is spurred to feverish activity by a mind swinging violently between hope and despair, it is only a question of time when the labor must be slackened, or end in physical collapse. Ingalls was unused to physical labor, and thus had not even the laborer's judgment that teaches him to set an even pace, which can be maintained steadily from day to day, and which insures refreshing sleep in the night and a reinvigorated body for the labor of the coming day. Ingalls drove his body through the day, and at night his restless mind forbade the forgetful sleep that alone could bring restored energy.

And so it happened that, on the morning of the thirteenth day at the Snow Flake, after a restless night, Ingalls became dimly conscious of a growing light, songs of many birds, and the dizzying roar of the creek, blending together, but far away, moving in rhythmic cycles that frenzied him with their maddening regularity. It was only outraged nature demanding her own, but to the fever-stricken man, tossing half delirious, it was a writhing brain that would not rest, and a body that would not cease from tingling with every motion,

that could not be stilled. As the sun dipped behind the mountains, the cool breezes lazily lifted the flap of his tent and rested with grateful touches upon his hot, dry forehead. With an effort, he wakened to the consciousness of a burning thirst, and with labored movements he crawled from his blankets and made his uncertain way to the creek. There he drank eagerly, bathing his face and hands in the cool water. The bucket which he had filled to take back to the tent, he found an almost insuperable burden ; but at last, completely exhausted, he set the bucket down, and, with a sigh, dropped upon his bed.

His fever, brought on by over-exertion and by much soaking in the cold water of the creek, had lasted for two days, yet, so far as he was concerned, it might as well have been two months. He had lost all track of time, as well as of everything else. He had slept and drunk and on the afternoon of the fifteenth day he waked, conscious of a ravenous hunger, and of the fact that Mike was still absent. Exertion was painful, for though the fever of complete exhaustion was gone, every bone and muscle was sore. Foolishly overlooking his severe lesson, he tried to work up the very state of mind that had laid him low, but in vain. When a man makes a complete idiot of himself, nature usually attempts to give him another chance for redemption. And so, try as he would, he could only dully recite to himself the main points of his case, and, with equal stupor, determine what to do at once. He saddled his horse and started for Manzanita.

The eastern sky had hardly begun to redden, when he rode past the little ranch house without stopping. He glanced in its direction, and saw it dimly outlined and quiet in the purple blackness of the low-lying shadows. Has darkness weight, after all? How else can the soft gray light of the waning stars float calmly above the shadows that cling to earth as the clear green waters of the sea upon the liquid depths below?

Ingalls thought for a moment of his sleeping wife, unconscious of his nearness, and half drew rein; but spurred on instead. His business must be attended to at once. It was imperative. A feeling that he was impelled by the necessity of important affairs soothed his pride and stifled a vague regret, just as if a single ray of light on a shadowed soul, one word of love to a thirsting heart, a soothing touch on a throbbing head, were not worth unnumbered times all the vain promises of a thousand iridescent dreams!

Ingalls was a self-important fool. But it will not do for us to jump for a stone, or to point with scornful fingers at moted eyes, for he was not alone, and is not. When Ingalls is dead and forgotten, a goodly company will take the place of him and his associates. Let any one burdened with the weight of his own importance thrust his finger in the ocean, and, pulling it out, let him look for the hole. If he be of a reflective turn of mind, he will gain a very clear comparative idea of his own individual importance in the complex mechanism of earthly affairs.

Manzanita was hardly astir, when Ingalls drew rein in front of the Big Swede's. He tied his horse, and, pushing open the canvas door, entered. The air was heavy with stale smoke and spilled liquor. A few uncertain lamps were feebly struggling to assert themselves in the growing light of the sun. Behind the bar, a tinselled girl with sodden eyes half reclined in a chair. The Big Swede did not keep an establishment where quiet sorrow abode the night, but neither did joy come with the morning. One might think it was only the reverse order. But the joys of her nights and the sorrows of her mornings were conducive neither to moral health nor to physical longevity.

"Where's the Big Swede?" Ingalls asked of the girl.

"Where any one but a blazing idiot would be at this time." The girl looked angrily at Ingalls, as she changed her position and prepared to doze again.

Ingalls saw that any attempt to extract information from the girl would end in an unsatisfactory war of words, and for that he had no inclination. Besides, his long ride had left him weak and sick, now that the excitement of it was over. There was a rude bench near one of the canvas walls, and on this he stretched himself and, pillowing his head on his arms, fell into a dreamless sleep of utter exhaustion. It was one of the most sensible things he had ever done. If Chase or Mary, instead of the Big Swede, had been present at his awak-

ening, the destiny of his life might have been changed.

It was nearly noon when he awakened, with the fever of mind and body departed. His life hitherto had been clean, and the reaction was sound and healthy. The Big Swede was not surprised to find him in the room, when she entered. She had been expecting him any time, and though her plan of handling him had been worked out in general, it was open to modifications as circumstances directed. At the first sign of his waking, she approached him with anxious inquiries as to his appearance. Ingalls's face was visibly thinned by the strain he had gone through, but the eyes that were raised to hers were clear and cool, and she recognized the fact that her task was to be rather more difficult than she had counted on. For the sake of gaining time, she avoided any allusion to the venture in which they were interested.

"I have n't had breakfast yet. I've been waiting for you." She looked at him with a pleasant smile; then, calling a waiter, she ordered breakfast at once.

"I have n't had breakfast nor anything else but a bad fever for the last two days. I have n't had even an assistant." Ingalls's tone was rather sarcastic.

"It's too bad. I told Mike how it would turn out; but you can't talk sense to a man on a spree. You must not work so hard."

"A man's got to work hard to keep up with five

per cent. a month, to say nothing of getting ahead of it."

Breakfast had been served, and they were dividing their time between eating and talking. The woman waved a deprecating hand in reply to Ingalls.

"Don't let five per cent. worry you. That's between you and me. The placer is between three of us. It's only a matter of time when that will be between you and me, too, if we work it right." She let her eyes rest on his with a knowing look.

"There are two sides to a question of that kind." Ingalls looked decided. "In the first place, that is n't square to Mike; in the second, the placer may not be worth it." He handed her a small bottle which he took from his pocket.

"What do you mean?" she asked, with well-feigned surprise.

"This. I've been panning that placer for nearly two weeks, and that's all I got." He placed the bottle in her hand. There was possibly a dollar's worth of fine dust in it.

"Isn't the ground all right?" She in turn looked at Ingalls surprisedly.

"I don't know. All I know is that I panned more dollars in a day with Mike than I panned cents in a week by myself."

"The ground must be pockety."

"It looks that way," Ingalls returned dryly.

The Big Swede's face grew hard, and there was an ugly look in her eyes. Her time had come to strike.

"Have you and Mike been putting up a game on me?" Every word was clear-cut and dry. "If you have," she went on, "don't lose your head. You will need it, before it is played out."

Ingalls looked in blank astonishment at the angry, threatening face. He made no attempt to conceal his complete surprise.

"Putting up a game on you!" he repeated. "Why—I—I"—he hesitated, and she broke in with angry impatience:—

"I—I—I—what?"

"The fact is," he stammered, "I had about made up my mind that the game was yours and Mike's, and that you had been playing me."

"Playing you!" she repeated, with biting sarcasm. "Who's been putting up the money for this business?"

"Why, you have, of course." Ingalls looked puzzled.

"Who told me the placer was all right?"

"I did. At least, I said I thought it was," he ended weakly.

"Thought it was all right!" She rose as she spoke. "And you got me to blow in my money on what you thought. Well, I'll tell you one thing, you've made a mistake. That's all I'll tell you, except this: the next time you feel like working a sucker, you'll know better than to try

it on me." She turned to leave, but Ingalls rose hurriedly and blocked her way.

"Wait!" he spoke excitedly. "You've made a mistake. I have n't been putting up a game."

She tried to pass him.

"Oh! I've heard men talk before."

Ingalls laid his hand on her arm.

"Will you stand out of my way?"

Ingalls dropped his hand.

"Won't you give me a chance to clear myself?"

His voice and manner were pleading.

She looked half relenting.

"Well?"

"It's like this." Ingalls spoke hurriedly. "I've been thinking it all out. When I went there with Mike, I did n't dig into fresh gravel, and I probably got some that had been partly washed by the water, really panned by the creek, you know. The gravel I panned last week, I dug fresh, and it did n't show as well. Why," he went on, as the woman's eyes grew less suspicious, "if the gravel had been as rich as we panned that day, gold would be a drug. Even averaging last week with that day, the gravel will pay big."

"Do you really believe that?" Her look was skillfully suspicious, but waning doubt was predominant.

"Why, I know it."

There was yielding in the Big Swede's face.

"On the square, now? Are n't you trying to work me?"

"On my honor, no."

The woman hesitated, with lowered eyes, then said slowly: —

"I'm bound to take your word. I can't help myself now."

Ingalls felt easier.

"I'll do all I can to help things along. I did n't want to spend all of my time there at the claim. Mike agreed to look after the work, but if he won't, I'll have to get some one else, or do it myself." He turned to leave. "I'm going to hunt up Mike, then go home to-night, and we'll start down early to-morrow morning."

"Oh, I'll hunt up Mike. I'll do that much, and I'll see that he starts, too." For once, at least, she meant exactly what she said.

Ingalls passed through the door, mounted, and rode away. The Big Swede listened to the receding hoof-beats. In the place of anger and suspicion was a satisfied smile. She was not accustomed to subtle analyses, or she could have congratulated herself on the conception and execution of a very adroit move. In mental as well as physical contests, if it is a fight to the finish, punctilious ceremonies are out of place. Punch first, and hard, and often, is the rule.

The Big Swede entered another room, where Smutty Mike was reposing.

"It's up to you, Mike. You let up pumping hot air now, and get a hustle on you."

"What's up?" he asked stupidly.

"You're going to be up, and lively, too. That tenderfoot's been here, and he's gone home. You pack your turkey and get down to his ranch before sun-up to-morrow, and start for the Snow Flake. Drag the tunnel. There's no rush. We'll have his whole lay-out if we go slow."

The tactics of the Big Swede had upset Ingalls more completely than she had guessed. He never suspected for an instant that her well-feigned anger and suspicions were other than genuine. He could not rest content with the consciousness of his entire innocence, but was racking his mind for some conclusive evidence which should convince her as well.

Mary was shocked at her husband's worn look. He had cleared himself of one trouble, only to be plunged into another, and he looked worried and anxious. She greeted him warmly; but she was grieved and sorrowful at the change in his physical appearance. She longed to know the results of his work, but feared to ask him. All her solicitude for his personal comfort was put aside, though gently, and he assured her that he was only tired.

"I know better," she insisted. "Now you are to make believe sick anyway, and you shall see what a good nurse I am."

"I have n't time to make believe sick," he answered laughingly. "I'll take your claim for granted."

"You may, if you want to," she answered; "but I'm going to make believe."

"You'll have to hurry, then, for I've got to go away again to-morrow."

"Oh, Herbert! Not really?" There was bitter disappointment in her voice.

"I must. I've found out that, if you want a thing done, you must attend to it yourself. I waited two weeks in the La Sals for that miserable Mike. I think he will be along to-morrow morning, and I've got to go with him. It's the only way to make sure."

"Do you think it's worth while?" She raised her troubled eyes to his face.

"It's too late for that question, Molly. It's a case of got-to now."

In addition to his financial risk, he felt that his good name was at stake. This last, being immediate, troubled him far more than his possible future ruin.

"Tell me about it, Herbert. Perhaps I can help you."

He gently stroked her hair, as he looked absently over the wide desert. For the first time in his life, he longed to make a full confession; but a hasty review of what he had to confess frightened him. He felt sure that she would not reproach him for his financial entanglement, but from his associate, the one to whom he was indebted, he knew that she would recoil in horror.

"You would n't understand, Molly." His heart sank over the deception. "Let's not think about it now."

She forbore to press him further.

Ingalls was right. She would have been shocked beyond measure, if she had known all. Had she harbored the suspicion that her husband was even then deliberately deceiving her, it is doubtful if she would ever have trusted him again. Ingalls knew this. As it was, there was the impending danger that she might at some time learn all from another. This was to be, and the other the last one who would occur to him as possible. This was a shadow that, whatever the outcome of the Snow Flake, he knew would hang over him for the rest of his life.

The next morning Ingalls was up early. Early as he was, Mike was waiting for him.

As he rode away, he called out to Mary: —

“Just tell Chase I’ve been called away again. He’ll look out for you.”

CHAPTER XIV

TOUGH NUT HAS HIS DAY

TOUGH NUT's slumber was long, but, if one could judge from the raucous notes that rasped their way through the thin door, it was laborious and lacked peaceful dreams. When at last it was completed, a stranger would have thought twice before he carelessly stirred up the sullen-looking man who pushed open the door and blinked in the light of Tice's bar-room.

Tice would gladly have changed places with his clerk, but, as that was impossible, he commended his soul to God, and prepared to make the best of a bad time.

Tough Nut walked deliberately to where Tice was standing behind the bar.

"Has Mr. Chase been in?" he growled, ignoring Tice's greeting.

"I have n't seen him."

"Can ye git a straight answer off the crooked tongue of ye? Stop lickin' yer whiskers an' answer me. Has Billy Chase been here?"

"No; he has n't, Mr. — er — Tough Nut."

"Gawd rist the soul of ye for lavin' the twist aff yer words! A straight bullet strains a crooked gun. Is there any letter for him?"

"No, sir."

"Nor for me?"

"No, sir."

"Ye're doin' well. *Pax vobiscum*, as the good praste says. I'll lave ye rist."

"If Mr. Chase should come, Mr. — er — Tough Nut, what shall I tell him?"

"Tell him to go to hell. I'll be back soon." And amid a roar of laughter from the crowd, Tough Nut went out, the jagged flaps of his hat beating time to his steps.

Tough Nut entered a neighboring restaurant and ate ravenously. Through the dusty window, he occasionally looked out on the street. Several times he saw Smutty Mike and Ingalls, sometimes together, at other times separate, but at all times apparently busy. He had passed by the tent of the Big Swede. He knew that better food was to be had there, but he feared the spice that he might be forced to take with it. He also feared that he might find Mike there as well. Indeed, he was certain of it. Of Mike he had no fear; but Mike and the Big Swede to back him! That was a combination.

As he ate, he thought. He recalled uneasily Chase's admonition in regard to Ingalls, and the fact that he had been the means of calling the Big Swede's attention to Ingalls. And here were Ingalls and Mike evidently intimately associated! What did it mean? No good to Ingalls, he could swear to that. Then the Snow Flake came into his mind.

"That's it, sure's hell!" His meal lost its savor. "Billy Chase'll be on to that, sure thing, an' he'll think I'm in it. Look here, Tough Nut, me boy, you've got to square yourself."

He jumped to his feet, paid his bill, and headed directly for Tice's. He looked a bundle of fiendish wrath, as he entered the door, with his hat pushed far back on his head and his hands hanging by his thumbs from his belted trousers.

"Tice, damn ye! What divilment have ye been workin'?"

Tice's jaw dropped, and he looked blankly at Tough Nut. The bar-room crowd hushed and stared.

"Shake the words off yer tongue lively. 'Tis Tough Nut yer toyin' with."

"I—I"—Tice stumbled, but could get no farther.

"Damn yer I's! Come with me now. Step high an' frequent."

Tough Nut turned to the lean-to. Tice, following, was thrust through the door which Tough Nut slammed and locked.

"Now, spake up, or I'll have a lung av ye first, an' the rist later!"

The terrified Tice was as confused in thought as he was in body.

"Why—er—Tough Nut, I don't know what you want."

"I'll remind ye. Ye 'call that Misther Ingalls is me friend?"

"I—yes. I know you gave him some good advice, excellent advice—er—Tough Nut. But 'I'm sorry to say he's not followed it."

"Yer on a hot trail. Now, bark, ye hell-pup!"

Tice guessed what Tough Nut wanted, and he told the story of Ingalls's coming to him for the money.

"You see—er—Tough Nut," he concluded, "I thought he wanted the money to risk on a mining venture, and I asked so much interest that I scared him off, as I knew I would. I can't do much, but I try to do all I can." With raised eyes and mumbling mouth, he was chafing his hands.

Tough Nut sat with a contemptuous smile baring his fangs.

"'Tis swate incense yer burnin' in a stinkin' pot. I know ye, ye divil. Be aff wid ye now, before I dust me boots on yer whiskers."

Tice hurriedly departed, and left Tough Nut still grinning. He sat for a while, the grin dying into a puzzled frown. He shook his head, as he finally rose and left the room by a door which opened into an alley.

"'Tis too much for the thick head av me," he muttered; "but Billy's the stuff. I'll lay low for a while, an' thin I'll put him on."

That was exactly what he proceeded to do. While Ingalls was hurrying his preparations in Manzanita, Tough Nut was judiciously treating a select crowd to the point of garrulous amicability,

thus adding to his knowledge of past events and gaining an exact idea of new moves. He made no effort to forecast.

"Whin a good man's workin' his gun, kape yer own fist aff the trigger."

Tough Nut was feeling very comfortable and easy. He had no need to square himself with Chase. Facts would do that for him. He was getting anxious on another score. Day after day the stage rolled into Manzanita from Placerville, but it brought no letter for him or for Chase. Even Tice was getting anxious, but he did not dare to hint of his anxiety to Tough Nut. Tough Nut was rolling up a fat account, but the growing figures were becoming minatory, and they no longer afforded him the complacent mind that had been their wont.

A few days after Ingalls's departure for the La Sals, Tice shook from the mail sack a bunch of letters. Prominent among them was a yellow envelope. It was a telegram mailed from Placerville and addressed to Tough Nut. Tice pounced on it with eager fingers. Tough Nut's hand was outstretched. Tice poised the envelope over the hand.

"Shall I read it to you — er — Tough Nut?"

"Lave me have it. Whin I'm needin' a private secretary, I'll not go to the devil."

Tough Nut thrust the envelope in his pocket, went out of the door, and laid a straight course for Dry Creek, not quite straight as to trail. At first he went in an opposite direction, then turned into

a thick clump of cedars, and then towards Chase's cabin. Chase was on the range when Tough Nut reached the cabin, so he busied himself about supper. When Chase finally rode up, after corralling his goats, he found his supper and Tough Nut awaiting him.

Tough Nut reached the message across the table. Chase glanced at it and laid it down. Tough Nut made no comment. They spoke briefly in monosyllables, and after the things had been cleared away and their pipes were filled, Chase picked up the envelope and tearing it open read the message.

"It's all right. Freeman's been delayed. He'll be here the fifteenth, sure."

Tough Nut took his pipe from his mouth.

"Say, Billy! It's all right, if he does n't come. She's the stuff, the Flush is, and I have ten thousand sure." He nodded with a knowing look.

"Oh, he'll come right enough."

Tough Nut coughed uneasily. Chase waited, unmoved.

"Say, Billy!" Tough Nut was wriggling nervously. "There's twice a hundred thousand in sight now. She's a wonder!" Tough Nut paused, looking with anxious cunning at Chase.

"Well?" Chase hardly moved a muscle.

"Say, that feller said he'd be here the first, did n't he?" Tough Nut paused, but Chase kept quiet, and he went on, "What about them laws of limitations?"

Chase never changed his position.

"Do you want me to help you in this business?"

"Gawd, yes, Billy! Say now, Billy, I would n't last as long as a snowball in hell with that feller, not without you." Tough Nut spoke eagerly.

"Then you walk straight and think straight, too."

"Now listen to that. That's Billy Chase talkin'!" Tough Nut pulled deprecating whiffs from his pipe. "I'm lavin' it to you, Billy! Sure thing. I just wanted me rights."

He dropped the subject and turned hastily to the information he had been gathering relative to Ingalls. He unburdened his whole soul in the way of reparation for the break he felt he had made in suggesting to Chase the possibility of backing out of his agreement with Freeman. Chase listened passively, but taking active note of everything Tough Nut offered. When Tough Nut had finished speaking, Chase looked at him quietly for a moment, then said:—

"That's all clear but one thing. How did Smutty Mike and Hilda get on to Ingalls?"

"Gawd rist me soul, Billy Chase! Say now! It's truth I'm tellin'. May the snakes come back to ould Ireland, an' St. Patrick be stung by a rattler, if it's not!" He then told Chase of the warning he had given the Big Swede to let Ingalls alone. "'Tis a hot fut me tongue travels with, but the little sinse in me thick head catches up."

He looked anxiously at Chase. "Ye'll belave me?"

"Sure thing." Then, after a pause, Chase added, "Do you know where Peter is? I have n't seen him for a long time."

"At the Germania, I'm thinkin'. Say now, hell's far away, or he'd broke through, sure, before this."

Chase smiled.

"Want to take a trip there and ask him to come over?"

"Do I want to go? Say now! 'Tis the very thing I was sayin' to mesilf; says I, 'Tough Nut, town air's not doin' well by ye. 'Tis a whiff from the mountains ye're needin'.' This night I'll start." And he did.

Freeman was waiting, as Chase rode up in front of Tice's two days later. There was a look of annoyance on his face that was more than pronounced.

"I've been trying to come to some sort of an understanding with that thick-headed Irishman, and what do you think?"

"Give it up," laughed Chase. "I never think much beforehand about Tough Nut."

Freeman laughed in spite of himself.

"Well," he said; "all the answer I've been able to get out of him is this: 'Lave be! Don't try to cut two heads aff one chicken. Ye'll spoil the carcass.' And when I asked him what he meant by that, he told me, if I could n't cool that,

I'd waste my breath blowing on hotter porridge. Then he left me, and I have n't seen him since."

Chase laughed at the puzzled look on Freeman's face.

"That's Tough Nut all right. But don't worry. We'll get things in shape."

"Are you acting for Tough Nut in this business?" Freeman asked.

"Yes, in a way. At least, he asked me to help him out."

Freeman's face fell.

"I'm sorry. I've taken the liberty to make some inquiries about you, and I had made up my mind to ask you to help me."

"You were quite at liberty to act as you did," answered Chase. "My duty towards Tough Nut does not prohibit my placing myself at your service."

Freeman looked up sharply.

"I'm not exactly what you call a tenderfoot, Mr. Chase."

"You are not at all obliged to accept, Mr. Freeman." If Chase was annoyed, neither voice nor word betrayed it.

"Nothing personal, Mr. Chase," Freeman spoke hurriedly; "only your proposition seemed a little unusual."

"I presume so." Chase spoke with evident indifference. "You need n't decide the matter now. Later, you may be able to act more intelligently on your own judgment."

"Well, let's go in and get down to business. There's Tough Nut now."

They entered and passed through the store into Tice's private office.

Tough Nut strutted about the little office for a while, his pipe in his mouth, his hat on the back of his head, and his hands hanging by the thumbs from his trousers belt. He was evidently primed for the occasion, and, as he expressed it, intended to take a prominent part in his own funeral.

Chase was not above thorough enjoyment of anything humorous, and the prospect of an encounter between Tough Nut and Freeman brought a suspicious twinkle to his eyes.

Freeman took a bundle of papers from his bag, and, selecting from them a sheet of memoranda, spread it before him.

"I don't suppose the order of procedure makes much difference," he began, when Tough Nut interrupted:—

"Whin two slape in one bed, let each kape to his own side. I've an order of me own." He rose and opened the door. "Tice, ye divil!"

"Yes, sir."

"Are me papers safe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Bring thim ter wanst."

"All of them — er — Tough Nut?"

"Lave workin' yer jaw! 'Tis the turn of yer ears. Shall I call the roll?"

Tice brought the papers. Tough Nut pounced

upon the envelope which was supposed to contain the draft, and ostentatiously tore it open.

"Where's me draft, ye thavin' hymn-book?"
Every bristle on Tough Nut's face stiffened.

"It must be in there — er — Tough Nut."

"'T is not!"

"It must be — er — Tough Nut." Tice was getting frightened.

"Look for yersilf, ye prothtracted meetin'!"

The perspiration was standing in drops on Tice's forehead.

"I certainly saw you put it in there."

"Produce it, thin, or I'll have the law on ye."

"I'll look through my safe again," chattered Tice, as he turned to leave the room.

"Scratch hard an' look sharp, or I'll show ye somethin' ye did n't see before."

Tice departed. Tough Nut calmly drew his buckskin pouch from his pocket, and, with a grin, took from it the draft.

"'T is a big scare I've trun inter the old hay-then."

"Tell him you've found it," suggested Freeman, not wholly understanding the affair.

"Not I," retorted Tough Nut. "'T will aise up on the divil a bit. 'T is hard pushed, is the old man, to kape him busy."

Freeman looked inquiringly at Chase; but Tough Nut went on: —

"Ye put strings on this, Mr. Freeman. Will ye take thim aff?"

"When the proper time comes."

"'T is here now," answered Tough Nut; "but in a damn big hurry. 'T is a long journey with short stops it's makin'. Spake lively."

Freeman was losing patience. As chairman of a board of directors, he could snap his business into line and close it up in the minimum of time. But an irrepressible Irishman and a statuesque man that nothing got away from or disturbed, embarrassed and irritated him.

"Look here, Tough Nut," he said; "that draft was sent you in good faith, but with certain conditions. When I'm satisfied that those conditions have been fulfilled, the money is yours with no further trouble. If other conditions meet your hopes, or at least mine, I'm ready to close the whole transaction." After a short pause, "The first thing I want to know is this." He consulted his memorandum. "Can you show a clean title?"

Tough Nut straightened.

"Clane title, is it? I've the firm hold av its pedigree as an Englishman av his bull pup. The greasers, meanin' the Spaniards, had it be right av conquest. The United States persuaded thim 't was spilin' on their hands an' tuk it aff. Thin, reposin' special confidence in me, an' in consideration av four corner stakes, wan discovery post, five hundred dollars of assissmint work, an' recordin' fees, gave it to me. G'wan. That's aisy."

Freeman leaned back in his chair with a look

of resignation. He was annoyed, but in spite of it an amused smile wrinkled his face.

"That may be your view of the case, but there are certain laws which must be considered."

"'T is a short code, quick judgment, and a long rope we have here," answered Tough Nut.

Chase had been a silent, though amused listener.

"I think I can help you and Mr. Freeman." He looked at Tough Nut for silence, but Tough Nut was not quite exhausted.

"Billy Chase has the flure! You've heard me opinion, now ye'll hear sinse. If ye take it all back wid ye, ye'll pay exciss baggage."

Chase opened a bundle of papers.

"Here's the United States patent. That clears title. Here are the affidavits of the men who have been working there; the surveyor's affidavits as to width of vein and depth of cross-cut below outcrop." He handed out still another. "Here is the assayer's certificate of assays. I believe that is all."

"Ye've one lacking," broke in Tough Nut. "I've Tice's certificate that I threw a barrel of his best whiskey down the necks av thim all for the good job they did. G'wan," continued Tough Nut, addressing Freeman. "'T is a dape well ye're drawin' from."

Freeman checked off various items from his memorandum sheet, then, absently tapping the sheet with his reversed pencil, he said half musically: —

"I think I must see the claim, myself, Mr. Chase. Will you go with me?"

"Yes, if you wish." He laughed quietly. "You see, I was going any way on Tough Nut's account."

"Well," replied Freeman; "that's only partly answered. I want you to advise me. Will you do it?"

"Yes."

Freeman rose, gathering his papers.

"The sooner we're off, the better it will suit me. When can we start?"

"Ter wanst," replied Tough Nut; "if ye can slape four nights in a big room with a high ceilin'."

"It will be a rough trip," interposed Chase; "but if you're in earnest, it is worth while."

Freeman began packing his traps, and Chase said, turning to Tough Nut:—

"Get Tice's desert wagon, put in plenty of blankets and two saddles." He turned to Freeman. "We can't drive all the way. We'll have to ride to the mine."

Tough Nut opened the door.

"Tice, ye divil!"

Tice appeared, anxious and perspiring.

"I can't find that draft anywhere."

"Niver mind, ye onfaithful sarvint. I have the dooplicate."

He gave the necessary orders for the wagon, and, seating himself, began filling his pipe. Freeman eyed the pipe suspiciously.

"Won't you have a cigar?" he asked, extending his case.

Tough Nut waved the proffered cigars aside.

"Me mouth is not bored for fixed ammynition. I'll load me pipe, wid yer lave."

The wagon was waiting before the party was ready, but they soon came out. Tice appeared with two bottles in his hands.

"Won't you take something with you?" he asked, extending the bottles.

Tough Nut repelled the proffered bottles.

"Take thim back. 'T is no funeral party, this. 'T is long life an' a Christian interment we're lookin' for."

Freeman was rather silent on the long drive. He paid little heed to his surroundings. Occasionally he addressed a shrewd question to Chase regarding the business in hand, and, on receiving the pointed answers which Chase gave him, relapsed into thoughtful silence. Like many another shrewd man of business, he had been drawn into this venture without the least idea of the perplexing details which it involved, details which he could not foresee, and only when confronted with them did he recognize his hopeless ignorance. Worst of all, being wholly out of his line of experience, he knew not where or to whom to turn for help.

He had had a vague idea that all mining was a huge gamble, wholly dependent upon chance for success; and only now did the fact begin to dawn upon him that every step, from the locating of the

prospecting shaft to the designing and placing of the mill, required the highest technical training, the wide experience and the quick, unerring judgment of the business man. Having gone thus far, he found little difficulty in taking the next step, the recognition that every point in a mining proposition must be free from obvious error, and a shaft misplaced might entail a charge against the ore that would be prohibitory, that a mill of uncalculated capacity, as measured with the mine, or unadapted to the treatment of the ores, might wreck even a first-class mine. He was doing some hard, close thinking, and the result was searching questions. The concise, direct, practical answers he received from Chase strengthened his liking for the man, and his confidence in him grew with his liking.

He smiled grimly, as he thought of the manner in which he had been drawn into this position. A friend in search of health had seen Tough Nut's specimens, become deeply interested, and had sent them on to him. The result was the draft. The friend had died, and then he, disliking to drop an unfinished undertaking, had kept on to the present time. His smile faded.

"Yes," he thought to himself; "I'll see it through."

The horseback ride to the mine from the night's camping place was short. In company with Chase and Tough Nut, he examined the outcrop, went into the tunnel and took numerous samples.

These he crushed in a mortar, and, under Chase's guidance, panned them down. Chase gave him a pocket balance and showed him how to manipulate the delicate scales and thus get an approximate tonnage value. He calculated the ore in sight. The result surprised him.

"According to this," he said, "there's more than twice the amount in sight that the property is bonded for." He looked sharply at Chase.

"There is n't much doubt about that." Chase spoke decidedly.

"Let's go back to camp," said Freeman. "I've seen enough to keep me thinking for a while."

"T is well," remarked Tough Nut. "'T is the owl that thinks much and hoots little has a belly full of mice."

Freeman was silent and preoccupied, while Chase and Tough Nut were busied with the care of the animals and the preparations for supper. After supper was over Freeman said:—

"I've a proposition to make. It is certainly to my advantage, and I believe it will be to yours." He addressed the latter remark to Tough Nut.

"'T is a balanced stick shows an even load," remarked Tough Nut. "I'm listenin'."

Freeman gave a concise summary of the conditions as he saw them, stating Tough Nut's and Chase's position as well as his own.

"My proposition is this," he went on. "We three will go into partnership on this thing. We'll call the business worth two hundred thousand dol-

lars. I'll take out one hundred and ten thousand, you and Mr. Chase," turning again to Tough Nut, "divide the ninety thousand between you. I'll put up all the necessary money to get the mine and mill in working order till it pays. Then we'll share the profits proportionately, provided," he laid special stress on the word, — "provided Mr. Chase will assume the entire management. What do you say?" He looked at Tough Nut.

"The stick is tippin' your way, I take note," Tough Nut said.

"I think the proposition a fair one. I take all risk. As for that, I'm perfectly willing to pay a cash bonus besides. Suppose I give you ten thousand dollars? Will that balance your stick?" He turned to Tough Nut.

"Lave it to Billy Chase, Mr. Freeman. I'd rejoice to give me good dollars for a part of his sinse."

"Well, what do you say, Mr. Chase?"

"The proposition is all right. For my part, I'll accept."

Chase had long seen, from the drift of Freeman's questions, the probable outcome of the matter.

Freeman, on his part, hardly needed the hearty indorsements of Chase which his inquiries had brought him. His personal contact with Chase had put him beyond the pale of doubt, and he never hesitated to act when once he had made up his mind. Chase was equally well satisfied with his contact with Freeman.

"Well, Tough Nut?" Freeman looked interrogative.

"Whin ye have a bull by the nose, don't mind the flirt of his tail."

Freeman chuckled. He was making a good deal out of Tough Nut now. He opened his bag and took from it paper and pens, and put the agreement in form for signature.

Tough Nut looked on in quiet astonishment.

"We nade tin men, a toon of powder, an' cookin' outfit an' grub. Look in yer bag agin, Mr. Freeman. If ye chanst ter find thim, I'll begin work at wanst."

Freeman smiled, but made no reply.

The papers were drawn and signed in triplicate.

"There! That's settled," said Freeman, as he handed Tough Nut the draft signed and marked "sight." "Now we can sleep sound. Now, Mr. Chase," he added, "you push things as fast as it seems advisable. Send on all accounts to me, and I'll return checks. Meantime, if anything pressing comes up, draw on me freely."

The next night they were in Manzanita. The following morning, Freeman was on his way to Placerville, *en route* for New York.

Manzanita was buzzing, but the camp was divided. Freeman's brief visit and hasty departure could be interpreted in two ways. Freeman had said nothing. Tough Nut only grinned dubiously, and no one cared to question Chase.

CHAPTER XV

FALSE LIGHTS

INGALLS was learning some valuable lessons, but, unless one profits by the learning, the time spent in acquiring is thrown away.

Mike, by every ingenious device which a cunning and unscrupulous mind could invent, had followed out the Big Swede's injunctions to drag the tunnel. The absolute ignorance of Ingalls about everything connected with mining made Mike's designs of easy accomplishment. Shots were misplaced to the end that they blew out only a handful of rock, or wasted their energy along seams, and not a few failed to explode. These latter were Mike's golden opportunities. He enlarged on the awful danger of missed holes, and, after a shot failed to explode, a whole day would be wasted, when twenty minutes or half an hour would have been an ample factor of safety. Then, after a few feet had been driven, Mike would discover that the floor was off grade, and days would be spent putting in trimming shots, or slowly picking the floor to line. Several times when a proper opportunity offered, Mike had purposely overloaded the holes. The result was what he had counted upon. The roof was torn and shattered, and then nothing

.

would do but to timber up the dangerous ground. The next shot the timbers would be torn out, and then there would be another delay replacing them.

Supplies ran low. Mike went to Manzanita for more. It was nearly two weeks before he returned. Mike gleefully recounted his devices to the Big Swede. She listened, with a satisfied smile.

"How long can you hold him off?" she asked.

"I can't make it last longer than the middle of November, anyway," he answered.

"We'll have something else ready by that time. He is in so deep now, he can't back out. About two more moves and he'll be done for. How'd you like to go on the ranch?" she asked. "There's money in goats." The woman spoke with a quizzical smile.

"I'm in for anything that pans," Mike answered.

"I've got a claim in Navajo Basin," she said irrelevantly. "We'll put him there next. When that's played out, we'll have one more, and that'll fix him. I'll shut down on him the first of the year."

"He'll kick like a roped Maverick," suggested Mike.

"No, he won't. He's fool all through. He's tied with his name to my papers, and he won't try to back out. His fool notion about his honor will hold him tight. Look here, Mike, there's all sorts of stories about the Royal Flush; but it's a

winner, sure. You just look it over and stake out an extension. That will fetch him sure."

Mike nodded approvingly.

"That's the stuff!" he said. "I'll do it first thing."

The woman was paying little attention to Mike, but sat, absently twirling a glass on the table.

"You found some gold in the Snow Flake?" she asked.

"Yes, one big pocket. You got all there was; you ought to know." Mike grinned sarcastically.

"There ought to be more," she went on. "Don't you think there is?"

"Oh, sure," answered Mike; "but it's pockety. There is n't anything in the top gravel."

"It's on bed rock. Suppose you had the top gravel washed off, you could get at bed rock easy, could n't you?"

"Yes, of course. What good's that? Bed rock's no good, if it has n't got the stuff. You know that, as well's I do." Mike spoke impatiently.

The Big Swede's voice was soft and purring. Mike heard and trembled. He knew what it meant.

"You can have the tunnel finished and the sluice in by the middle of November?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Mike.

"Then can you ground-sluice the top gravel in two weeks?"

"Yes; but what's the use?"

"Listen, you fool!" Her voice was hard, and there was a steely glitter in her eyes. "You get that done. Push things hard now. Don't let any gold show up. You can stop that. After the top is sluiced off as much as you can, just throw up the sponge and quit. Ingalls will come back here. I'll take his interest in the Snow Flake, trade it for an interest in the Navajo and the Extension. When he's out of it, you go back and push the Snow Flake for all it's worth."

Mike's eyes were wide open.

"My God, Hilda, you are a devil!"

She made no reply to this.

"Now hustle!" she said.

Mike found Ingalls all but sick with worry and overwork. He could do little in the tunnel, single-handed, so he had busied himself getting out timbers for the sluice. He bitterly reproached Mike for his long delay in Manzanita, but Mike bore the reproaches meekly. He was not going to kick over his porridge, even if it burned.

Ingalls took heart over Mike's application to his work. There were no more missed shots or overcharged holes. Every shot told. Long before the middle of November the tunnel broke through and promptly on time the sluice was laid and the water turned on. A bend in the creek made the construction of a wing dam an easy matter, and by this the whole stream was turned against the foot of the gravel bank and then, loaded with debris, it plunged into the tunnel, and with a roar, water and

gravel and huge boulders, emerging from the mouth, crashed over the cliff and into the Dolores.

Ingalls had worked hard before. Now, from the gray of the morning to the last glow of twilight, he was busy with pick and shovel and bar. Several times, in breaking a jam at the head of the tunnel, he had narrowly missed being swept in to certain death when the jam was broken. He only laughed at Mike's earnest cautions, and went on as before. His nervous energy increased rather than diminished, as the days went by. The rush of water and the rattle and crash of caving banks was music in his ears, that sang of golden wealth and of hard-earned, single-handed triumph.

The first of December had been set for the clean-up. Early in the morning, a well-placed shot broke the wing dam, leaving only a small stream flowing through the sluice in the tunnel. Mike had purposely left a deep pocket at the head of the tunnel. This would stop the greater part of the gold, if there were any, leaving only the finer gold to lodge in the riffles or be swept through into the river. Ingalls would not think of looking in the pocket, only in the sluice. On this point Mike had skillfully coached him.

It was the middle of the afternoon when the last shovelful of black sand had been put into buckets preparatory to panning down. Ingalls had been bitterly disappointed in finding no nuggets in the first riffles in which no quicksilver had been placed. Mike assured him that that was nothing, that nuggets could not be expected in top gravel.

They worked hard, panning out the amalgam. With every panful, Ingalls's heart sank deeper and deeper. His golden dreams were vanishing fast. It was hardly a handful of amalgam that was finally placed in the retort. When the retorted gold was weighed, there were barely eight ounces.

Ingalls had measured the gravel washed. It was about three thousand yards. He made a few calculations and handed them to Mike. One hundred and fifty dollars from three thousand yards! Five cents a yard! Mike read the paper and shook his head.

"It's N. G.," he remarked. "We're stuck."

"You take it pretty coolly," said Ingalls. His wan face was ashy, his voice was unsteady.

"Might's well," replied Mike. "It's miners' luck."

Ingalls sat dejectedly, with working mouth. Suddenly he sprang to his feet, his eyes flashing with suspicious rage.

"Look here, Mike, I believe you've been putting up a game on me. I'll tell you one thing. If you have, I'll twist this drill 'round your lying neck." He shook a steel drill in Mike's face.

Mike was frightened. He moved, as if to rise.

"Don't stir," Ingalls drew back the drill; "or I'll break your head."

Mike stiffened suddenly.

"Give a fellow a chance, can't you?" He raised his eyes to the threatening drill, but was quiet otherwise.

"Go on." Ingalls spoke, but the drill was not lowered.

"Every bit of the gold that you panned came from this placer, the Snow Flake," he added. "It's God's truth."

"Why have n't we got more, then?" The drill still threatened.

Mike shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here, Ingalls," he answered; "I don't blame you for kicking, but don't kick me. Listen to reason, can't you?" He was watching Ingalls closely. "I have n't made a cent out of this thing, and you know it. I've lost my time here, as well as you."

Ingalls felt the truth of Mike's plausible statement. There was a sudden revulsion. The threatening drill was lowered and his head drooped.

"I'm worse hit. I've lost all I've got in the world."

Mike sprang to his feet. One hand was resting on the butt of his revolver. Ingalls was not going to get the drop on him again. He was angered to have been caught napping. He spoke with sneering assurance.

"I don't mind telling you for your own good that you were a damned fool to go into this business at all. Don't move. It's my turn now." Ingalls had started suddenly, but was looking squarely into Mike's gun. "Now you're in," Mike resumed; "your only way is to stick it out. I'll tell you one thing more, don't ever put the

drop on a man, unless you mean business. You won't get off so easy next time."

"I did mean business. You'd have found it out, too, and will yet, if you've salted this thing on me." Ingalls spoke sullenly.

The abject misery of the man would have moved to pity any one who was not dead to every sense of honor. As for Mike, he rather gloated over his victim. He wanted to enjoy to the full his despicable triumph, but he remembered the words of the Big Swede. Besides, Mike had seen men of Ingalls's stamp go to pieces before. He could not analyze motives, but he could recognize symptoms. He knew that Ingalls was mad with a sullen desperation, that would end in blood if pushed too far.

"I would n't talk about salting, either," he continued. "That's bad medicine. It does n't speak well for you, and the man that's salted a mine does n't like to be accused of it."

Ingalls made no reply, but turned and began to get together a few of his belongings. He then saddled his horse and tied his bundle to the saddle.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mike.

"Going to get out of this as fast as I can." The voice was hollow.

"You'll see the Big Swede?" pursued Mike.

"Yes." Ingalls swung into his saddle.

"Give her this." Mike handed him the gold.

"You can divide it."

Ingalls took it mechanically and rode away with no further words.

Mike watched him as he disappeared.

"The Big Swede's playing for more than his dirty little pile," he muttered to himself. "I wonder what it is."

Mike entered the little cabin, and, after eating his supper, lay down to as quiet a sleep as if he had had no part in reducing to a hopeless wreck a man who had trusted him. Even could he have foreseen the terrible end of it all, his slumbers would not have been disturbed.

He had already staked out the extension of the Royal Flush, and, having collected some specimens, had sent them with his notice of location to the Big Swede. The next morning, trusting to the Big Swede's "fixing" Ingalls, he went leisurely to the placer and began work. The pocket that he had arranged at the head of the sluice did not yield as richly as he had hoped, but it was yet rich, and every night he added more or less gold to his store. He worked patiently and with no fear of consequences. Even if the Big Swede failed or changed her plans, and Ingalls returned, he had a plausible excuse ready. He could simply tell Ingalls that he had made up his mind to give the placer another trial.

He even prepared for such a possible emergency. Instead of putting all his gold in one bag, he divided it judiciously, and, keeping a part of it in his mess-box, he cached the larger part in a safe hiding-place. Having exhausted the pocket, he began digging pits in various places where the sur-

face gravel had been washed away. In the larger number, bed rock was soon reached, but his reward was not great. Occasionally nuggets were found, enough to pay better than wages, but nothing startling. One place he finally hit upon promised better. The gravel was deep and the water annoyed him, but indications were highly encouraging. Days grew into weeks, but in spite of the growing cold he kept on. He felt sure now that he would make a strike richer than his first discovery. It was only a few days before Christmas when the lowering temperature forbade further work, but Mike was well contented. The gold he had taken out reached into the thousands and the pocket was not exhausted. He prepared to go to Manzanita for a celebration.

Mike had been thinking as well as working ; but his thoughts were not of a nature to reflect credit upon even such a man as himself. The thought that Ingalls had got the drop on him rankled in his mind. He persuaded himself that Ingalls had given up and left him in the lurch, when a little more work would have proved the value of the claim, and he, with his growing hoard of gold, grew virtuously indignant.

"Serves him right," he commented to himself, "for squealing!"

He again thought how Ingalls had held his life in his hands.

"I'll get even with him for that, Chase or no Chase!" he growled. And with these pious thoughts in his mind, he started for Manzanita.

Meanwhile, Ingalls had again ridden past Dry Creek without a halt. Only in front of the Big Swede's did he draw rein. He did not even give a thought to his wife, as he rode by, except to take a trail leading through a deep arroyo which would hide him from the house. Deeper and deeper, his bitter disappointment plunged him in abject misery. The thought of Chase and Peter were like hot irons, searing his flesh. Then there was Tough Nut! The contemptuous insolence of the lucky Irishman was as salt on an open wound. He had hoped to triumph over them, especially over Tough Nut, and he had failed. Failed beyond redemption, for he had staked all on a single throw! Failed utterly and irredeemably, and, worst of all, it was beyond his power to conceal it from them. His flocks were gone, his ranch was gone, even his ranch house, and he was a homeless wanderer. He might fly beyond the reach of mocking tongues, beyond the gleam of leering eyes; but the uttermost parts of the earth could not separate him from the memory of his failure and of them.

Truly, not only the measures we mete to others, but the measures we would mete, if circumstances allowed, shall be measured to us again in kind.

Had Ingalls been successful, his triumph would have been worn with insolent defiance; now that he failed, he could only see that the cup which he would have tendered to others would now be pressed to his own lips.

"Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord. Who but

the fool shall dare to murmur, if he lay his hand upon the weapon of infinite mercy and justice, and find its keen edge threaten him with bitter death? Poor Ingalls seethed in the bitterness of his blind self-isolation! Chase, and Peter, and Mary, each with naught but love and compassion and sorrow in their hearts! And Tough Nut!

The Big Swede listened to Ingalls's story of hopeless disaster with outward sympathy, but with inward satisfaction.

"Of course," concluded Ingalls, "it's all over with me now. I can't pay you. The sooner you close me out, the better. It's only a matter of time, anyway."

"Then I shall have to take the range and the goats?"

"Yes, that's the size of it. I have n't got any money."

"But what shall I do with a goat-range?" The woman's voice was musical.

"I don't know," replied Ingalls.

"No more do I. Come, you are too much cast down. You're not dead broke yet. Let's have something to drink, and perhaps we shall find a way out yet."

"I don't drink," answered Ingalls sullenly.

"Neither do I, except with my friends." She drew a chair up to the table and motioned him to it.

She poured out a glass of whiskey and pushed it towards him. Ingalls drank it mechanically. She touched her own glass with her lips.

"Here's to our better luck next time!"

"That's all right, but there is n't any next time for me. I'm done for."

"You got nothing in the clean-up?" she asked, ignoring his last remark.

"Only this." Ingalls shoved the little bag towards her.

The woman weighed it in her hand. When next she spoke, there was the soft purr in her voice that had quickened Mike.

"Three thousand yards, did you say?"

"Yes."

"That's bad; worse than bad. It's no good, not for us." She looked quietly at Ingalls as if measuring him in full, then continued, "When you lose at roulette, double your bet on the same color. You're bound to win."

"It takes money to double, and I tell you I'm done for." Ingalls spoke querulously. There was wearied impatience in his voice.

"Are you going to keep your interest in the Snow Flake?" she asked.

"How can I help it? Who'll take it, even as a gift?"

"I will, not as a gift, though." The woman spoke decisively.

"You will?" Ingalls repeated incredulously.

"Yes. I've seen too much mining to lay too heavy on one thing. I've been looking out for other chances, and I've got them, two of them."

"I don't see how that helps me out."

"What do you say to this?" She told Ingalls of the claim in Navajo and the one in the La Sals. "There's a prospector owed me money," she continued; "and he gave me these claims for his debt. If you'll transfer your interest in the Snow Flake to me, I'll give you a half-interest in the Bull Dog and the Extension."

"For my interest in the Snow Flake?" There was a ring of hope in his voice.

"Yes; only you'll have to do the assessment work. I'll charge half of supplies to you and you put in your time. There's a chance for you." She showed him specimens of ore from both claims.

"That looks like the Flush ore," Ingalls said, picking up one of Mike's purloined specimens.

"Of course it does," she returned. "It's the Extension of the Flush. If Tough Nut had n't been a fool, he'd staked out two claims. As it is, we've got it."

Ingalls's spirits rose rapidly. Here was a chance, not only to recoup himself, but to turn the tables on Tough Nut as well.

"I'll do it," he exclaimed.

The Big Swede told of Freeman's visit to Manzanita. What Manzanita was holding to be true, she stated as a positive fact: that Freeman had bought the Royal Flush outright, and had paid Chase a large commission for his services. She put in an adroit touch of her own.

"If Chase had been as smart as folks think he is, he'd had a claim of his own to sell."

Ingalls took the bait.

"And Chase, too," he thought.

"I'll get right back to the La Sals. There's grub enough at the Snow Flake to last a month yet."

This did not at all suit the Big Swede's plans.

"No," she said. "The Bull Dog first. You have n't got to drive more than ten feet to cut that vein. The assessment must be done before the first of January. The Extension's just been located. You've got ninety days for that. Besides, snow's likely to shut you out from Navajo. The Extension is open all winter."

"That's so," replied Ingalls. "The Bull Dog it is."

The Big Swede had carried her point. Ingalls had touched on the subject of his indebtedness to her, but she had turned it lightly aside. She knew very well that at a forced sale even, Dry Creek would bring more than her note against it. She did not want to force matters yet. If she could get Ingalls still more deeply involved, she knew that he would turn over the entire property to her without the trouble and danger of foreclosure. If she could fan into a fierce flame Ingalls's resentment against Chase, she felt that Chase would be entirely separated from Ingalls, and so from Mary. She knew that if the scales should once fall from Ingalls's eyes, to the end that he should see Chase as others saw him, her influence would be at an end.

Another possibility occurred to her. Ingalls had never been jealous of his wife. His vanity forbade that ; but if once that passion should be aroused in him, it would be fierce and overpowering. If Ingalls once suspected what she believed, she knew that it would rouse a storm which she could not control. Jealousy is a keen weapon, but it has two edges.

Ingalls cherished a growing dislike for Chase, because Chase was right and he was wrong. Every demonstration of this fact increased the breach. She recognized this, and, letting go other possibilities, she bent her energies to keeping Ingalls going wrong.

The Big Swede was very wise. She never hunted mice with an elephant gun.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LOCKING SPANS

WHEN expecting attack from a certain quarter, we brace ourselves to meet the coming shock. If the attack comes from another point, our very posture of defense hastens our overthrow.

After her interview with Chase, Mary had wrought herself up to the very highest point of noble resolution. Suppose the venture in which her husband had embarked should fail, not a word of reproach would she utter. She would show him that her love was undiminished, that her sympathy was his, that whatever she had was his, that however serious was the mistake, however disastrous the results, they, he and she together, would live them down, and upon the wreck of the past build an enduring structure of mutual love and trust. She had not been so happy and care-free for days. She did not allow herself to think that his success in this venture would disappoint her, her disbelief in it was too strong to permit the consideration of a possible success. Only, how sweet it would be to go on henceforth, forgiving and forgiven!

And so it happened that, when Ingalls reached Dry Creek that night with his breath reeking and

his senses muddled with the fumes of much drinking to the success of their new enterprises, Mary was thrown completely from the balance of her lofty resolutions and laid prostrate in the presence of an unexpected attack.

"Why, Herbert, you've been drinking!" There was no reproach in her voice, only the moan of hope wounded to the death.

"Well, what if I have?" he flung out. "Have n't I a right to take a drink, if I want to?"

"No! No! Not you, Herbert! Don't!" Her voice was scarcely audible.

"I tell you I have, and I will. I'm tired of this everlasting nag, nag, nag, all the time." His tongue was as thick as his wits.

She looked up in mute surprise.

"I don't mean to nag, Herbert. I never have meant to. I love you, and I have wanted to help you. Won't you believe me and forgive me?" Her eyes were raised to his face with pitiful pleading, her hands were outstretched to him.

He would not look at her eyes; her hands were thrust roughly aside.

"I know all about that," he replied brutally. "You've brought all your damned straight-laced, puritanical notions out here with you. They won't work in this country. I'll tell you that straight. I know what I want, and I'm going to have it, too, in spite of goat-herders, lunatics, and hell!"

Mary sank into a chair. There was no trace of color in the blanched cheeks, only the drawn

whiteness of stupefying despair, no motion save the trembling of her little white fingers.

Ingalls noted her position. There was no pity, only brutal contempt.

"Oh, put it all on!" he said. "First it's nag. That did n't work. Now it's sulks. Well, that is n't going to work, either."

When whiskey buzzes in the ears and steams in the brain, one thinks clearly and sharply; but it does not at all follow that one thinks either rightly, wisely, or well.

"I'm going to be away for a month or so," Ingalls went on. "If you want anything, get the herder to help you out. That's what he's paid for."

With no more words, he gathered up a few pieces of clothing, jammed them into a rude bundle, and left the house. This time he headed for the Navajo. It was the same trail they took when they made their trip to Little Lone Cone.

Mrs. Hurley had discreetly absented herself during Ingalls's brief visit; but, animated in part by curiosity, in part by a laudable sympathy, she had not gone far enough to prohibit her from hearing a part of what went on. When she saw Ingalls ride away, she reëntered the room. Mary's abject misery roused all her homely sympathy. She approached her, and, laying a fat, motherly arm upon Mary's shoulders, she broke forth into words of intended comfort.

"Law, Mrs. Ingalls," she said; "don't take on

so. Us wimmin folks has to put up with a lot. I know all about it." She paused. Then, meeting with no response, went on, "Yes, I bet I know all about it. My old man, he used to be jusso. Men is bound to be men. They'd be wimmin if they was n't, and, bein' men, they can't understand wimmin. Don't I remember! The second week we's married, my old man, he come home drunk, drunker 'n your man was to-night." Mary shuddered. Mrs. Hurley responded with a comforting hug. "Law! I did n't say nothin', only jest laffed. An' I put him to bed. He's that drunk, he could n't help himself. I did n't say a word, jest laffed, an' he got mad, en the madder he got, the more I laffed. He went on scand'lous, but I jest laffed. I knew he's drunk. Well, next mornin' you'd otto seen him! My, but he'd got a head on him! Jest hummin', but he's sober then. I fixed him up, got him sothin' to fix his stummie. I don't know how men's stummies feel, but it must be awful to make 'em go on so; but all the time I laffed at him, an' if you'll believe me, when he got over it, he was jest as shamed as shamed, an' he ain' never come home drunk since." She again paused, looking at Mary. "Of course he takes a drink once 'n while, now. Men don't seem to have sense, but he never gets full."

Every word was torture to Mary. She rose on unsteady feet. The supporting arm did not leave her.

"That's right, dear," the homely voice went on.

"I'll help you get right to bed, and I'll make you a strong cup of tea."

She led Mary to her room and placed her on her bed, but the supporting arm was still with her. Gently the arm was withdrawn and, after many reassuring pats, Mrs. Hurley left the room. Soon after, she reappeared with a cup of tea which she gently forced Mary to drink.

"Now you jest go right to sleep. Things won't look half so black to-morrow." And with a parting caress she left the heart-broken woman to her hopeless, shaming sorrow.

If Mary could only have "laffed an' laffed"! There are many diseases of the body that yield more readily to homely poultices than to heroic surgery.

All through the long night, Mary tossed with burning, tearless eyes that with all their straining could see no ray of light. Through the long, dreary days that followed, Mrs. Hurley never flagged in her homely efforts to rouse the sorrowing woman from her callous despair. The success of her efforts was not so great as she had hoped, but yet they were productive of much good that she could not see. They were more beneficial than Mary, even, knew.

As Christmas drew near, Mrs. Hurley tried another line of action. She had planned to go home for over Christmas, and she proposed to go to Manzanita, the twenty-third, to make some few purchases which would remind her grandchildren

that Christmas was a day of days, a day to look forward to with delight, to remember with pleasant satisfaction. She determined to have Mary go with her, and at last insisted upon it. Mary listlessly consented.

The morning of the twenty-third came at length, and with it Peter and Bartholomew. Peter was sent away, a willing messenger, and, shortly after, Mrs. Hurley, beamingly triumphant, with Mary beside her, drove away to Manzanita.

Tice's was yet the great emporium for scattered ranchers, and he did a thriving business in tinsel toys and colored candies, that brought delight to the isolated lives of the ranchers' children. Mrs. Hurley had, with Mary, deposited many mysterious bundles in the wagon which was hitched at some distance from Tice's; and now, with Mrs. Hurley in the lead, they were making their final trip preparatory to leaving. Mrs. Hurley had already unhitched and had seated herself in the wagon. As she turned to look for Mary, she was in time to see a stately woman, richly dressed, place herself in Mary's path and to hear a softly musical voice : —

"Mrs. Ingalls, I know. I want to speak to you." There was a cruel cunning in the smiling face, a merciless determination manifest in the soft, rippling words.

Mary, with colorless face, stood as if turned to stone.

"I am Miss Hilda Bergstrom. Your husband

and I are old friends." There was no change of voice or manner.

"I don't know all of my husband's friends." Mary's voice was hollow. She tried to pass, but with no apparent motion, the Big Swede was again in her path.

"No?" The woman spoke with a rising inflection. "These men! These husbands! They are very sly. They don't always tell their wives of their lady friends." There was an insulting caress in every word, that cut with the smooth, noiseless thrust of a keen-edged dagger.

Again Mary tried to reach the wagon.

"Will you allow me to pass?" There was no pleading in her voice, only a calm request.

"Not yet. I have a little matter to settle with you first."

"I can have nothing you want. Will you allow me to pass?" Mary moved and spoke with the accurate precision of a puppet.

"But you have. Don't hurry. Perhaps this place is too public. Will you come over to my private room? Your husband is not there now." She motioned to the nearly completed building which was taking the place of the canvas tent.

The thrust went home, but Mary did not show it by outward sign.

"I want nothing to do with you. I will have nothing to do with you." Mary's eyes were calm and cold. They looked steadily into the eyes of the leering woman.

"That's just it. But you will have to if you stay here. Your husband's very fond of me. I think you will have him more to yourself if you take him away. This climate is not good for you. You are growing thin. Your color is all gone. You see, when your beauty goes, your husband will go with it. Just think of that, my dear! I know all about men. You see it's for your own good I'm speaking. What do you say?"

Mary looked indifferently at the woman as at some troublesome bramble that lay in her path.

"I believe I told you that I wanted nothing to do with you, that I would have nothing to do with you. Will you allow me to pass, or shall I call for help?"

"Calling for help would make a scene. You don't want that. It would n't be nice. I would see to that. Your husband has done some very foolish things. If you should force me to tell about them, he would n't like it at all. He would n't dare make it unpleasant for me, but I imagine he would n't be so afraid of you." The woman spoke with deliberate, patronizing insolence.

On Mary's part there was a fierce inward struggle to maintain her self-control. Outwardly, as yet, there was no sign. She felt the cold, pitiless logic of the Big Swede's position. She did not dare to force a disclosure of her husband's actions, especially a public one. She feared a disclosure, even to herself. So far, she knew of nothing that would forbid her yielding submissively to her hus-

band's will, nothing that she could not forgive with honor. But what did this woman know that she did not know? That she did not dare to know? Was it better to remain in ignorance, even though ignorance was paid for in shameful humiliation, or to allow a disclosure that might force her into open, loathing rebellion against her husband? She could not bring herself to decide. Another thought crept upon her, at first insidiously, then in revolting daring, the shameful humiliation which her husband was even now forcing her to bear.

She stood silent, her eyes coldly indifferent.

The Big Swede watched her closely. Her next move was fiendish, prompted by devilish cunning. Slowly she stepped from Mary's path, but her eyes never left the impassive face. The motion forced Mary to a choice. She must yield openly, or — There was a moment's tense pause. The eyes of the Big Swede glistened in triumph. She had won!

A stumpy hand minus two fingers was laid on the shoulder of the Big Swede. A stubby face shaded by a crownless hat was thrust close to the Big Swede's ear. A voice, husky with fear: —

"'Tis time to hunt our holes! Harry Ellis's bruk loose!"

The woman turned toward Tough Nut, shaking his hand from her shoulder with a shrug of disgust.

"Where is he?" Calm as she appeared, she could not wholly keep anxiety from her voice.

Tough Nut looked up in feigned surprise.

"Where is he?" he repeated.

"Yes. Have you lost your wits?"

A whip cracked. There was a rattling of wheels, and a cloud of dust drifted from the street.

Tough Nut, with his hands on his knees, lowered himself to a boulder where he rocked himself to and fro.

"Sure, yer Eve's own daughter; squaler at a mouse an' stand oop to a mule." A series of raucous gurgles grated from Tough Nut's mouth.

The woman looked for a moment at the rapidly disappearing wagon in which was Mary Ingalls. She comprehended Tough Nut's ruse. She flung a look of biting fury at him, as she turned to cross the street.

"I'll settle with you for this."

"A striking snake with pulled teeth only breaks his own head."

"Don't fool yourself!" The woman's voice was not raised. "You'll be sorry for this."

"Go aisy, go aisy, Hilda! Listen to a wise man! Whin a buzz-saw's hummin', don't feel of its teeth."

Tough Nut, still chuckling and gurgling, rose from the boulder and walked along the trail towards Dry Creek. A few miles out, he met Chase. Chase reined in his horse.

"What's up, Tough Nut?"

"That's as may be," replied Tough Nut. "'Tis pull goslin', pull grass. With the gander, 't is only a snap and a swally."

Chase laughed.

"Out with it!"

"'T will be a snap and a swally with you, Billy, barrin' iver you 're no gander."

Tough Nut recounted the Big Swede's attack on Mary and his measures of putting her to flight.

Chase, with compressed lips, listened without a word. As Tough Nut finished he spurred his pony to a lope.

"I'll see you in Manzanita."

Tough Nut grinned, as he noted the look in Chase's eyes.

"'T is a warty toad puts good bugs in his belly. Tough Nut, me boy! 't is well that yer wit's not as skittish as yer beauty."

The spirit died from the Big Swede's welcoming smile as she looked into the eyes of Chase. He motioned her to a little room, closing the door behind her as she entered.

"Now I want the whole business, Hilda, from beginning to end."

"What business?" she stammered.

"Don't waste time, and don't dodge. It's no use."

"Ingalls and I are in partnership. It's none of my doing. He came to me." She spoke with a touch of defiance.

"Well?"

"That's all there is to it," she went on sullenly. "He went for Tice's money, and Tice would n't let him have it. Then he came to me."

"What did he want of the money?"

"To buy an interest in a claim."

"Whose claim?"

"The Snow Flake."

"Whose claim?"

"Well, Smutty Mike's."

"How did Mike get after Ingalls?"

"How should I know?"

"You do know. Tell me."

"I won't!" she flashed out.

"You'd better. I'm going to take a hand now. I don't think it will be to your advantage to hold back anything."

The momentary flash of defiance passed away.

"What more do you want?"

"I told you. I want it all."

She began with Tough Nut's visit at Moab and ended with Ingalls's departure for the Navajo.

"You've left out one thing. Did n't Tough Nut warn you to let Ingalls alone?"

"Yes."

"You did n't do it. You made a bad break."

She sprang to her feet with flashing eyes, and gave way to the storm of passion that raged within her. Chase waited until her fury had spent itself.

"Sit down," he said. "We may be able to fix things yet."

She obeyed his command, waiting dumbly.

"How much did you let Ingalls have?"

"Three thousand dollars."

"Any more?"

"Only his share of expenses at the Snow Flake."

"How much was that?"

"Three thousand more."

"Is that all?"

"Every cent."

"No interest?"

"Yes, of course."

"Get the papers. I want to see them."

The woman left the room. Returning, she placed a bundle of papers before Chase. He opened them one by one, making notes on a separate slip. Gathering the papers into a bundle, he wrote on another slip.

"Send this to Tice at once."

The woman took the note, but did not rise. Instead she sat twisting it.

"What do you want of Tice?"

"You are going to sign a few papers for me."

"Suppose I won't?"

"You'll leave the town within twenty-four hours."

The woman rose to go.

"Wait a moment. Bring Mike back with you."

She left the room without a word. In a few minutes, she returned with Mike. There was a frightened look on his face. Chase was writing. When he had finished, he said:—

"I want you to listen to this." He read from the paper. "Will you sign this, Mike?" The

question assumed an affirmative answer which was readily given.

Chase acknowledged Tice's greeting.

"You have your notary's seal?"

"Yes, sir."

Chase held a pen to Mike.

"Sign here."

Mike did as he was ordered, and after the usual formal question Tice affixed his seal.

"That's all, Mike. You may go now. Perhaps you will be interested to know that Harry Ellis is in Placerville inquiring for you."

Mike slunk out of the room.

The other papers were soon signed and sealed. Tice accepted his fees and departed, much wondering.

The Big Swede turned to Chase a face from which every trace of color had fled. There was no fire in her eyes, only a pleading, hopeless look.

"Is that all, Billy?" The voice was soft and slightly tremulous.

"Unless you choose to tell me more."

"What more, Billy?"

"You took a big chance on Ingalls. What did you do it for? You need n't answer, unless you choose."

Her lips worked convulsively.

"For you." Her voice was scarcely audible.

"For me?" Chase repeated. He did not try to conceal his surprise.

"For you," she went on softly. Then, bursting

into sudden fury, "I wanted to get him out of the country, him and his white-livered, pinch-faced wife. I hate her. I would n't have wiped my feet on that fool, only for that. You ask me why? Oh, Billy, don't you know?" She flung herself on her knees before him. "I know I'm not fit for you. I know. I know. Let me be your slave. That's all. Don't leave me for another. Let's go away — to San Francisco — New York — anywhere! I've got plenty of money."

Chase tried to interrupt her, but he could not stem the torrent of her passion.

"I won't ever trouble you. I'll give you all my money and I'll get more. It's yours. I've been saving it ever since I knew you. Ever since the time you made me tell you all about that shooting! No one ever dared to look at me that way before." She raised herself to her feet, and stood before him with widespread arms, and nostrils dilating with scorn. "The cringing, sneaking, lying fools! I knew what they wanted, but it's God's truth, Billy, they paid dear for what they got. I fought them as they taught me to fight, and I always won. Till you came" — She flung herself wildly into a chair.

"I did not know all this, Hilda. I did not even suspect it." Chase spoke kindly. "Forget it, as I shall. You can and you must."

His words were not heartless, but the woman knew him too well to try to find in them either comfort or hope. Deeply as her feelings had been

stirred, she was still their master. There was yet an untried path. If she could not draw him to herself, she might turn him from another. At length, without raising her head, she spoke.

"It is true, then, all this that's being said?"

"What is true?" Chase had put the papers in his pocket, rising as he spoke.

"That Billy Chase is doing more than herd Ingalls's goats."

"I don't know what you mean." He spoke indifferently, his hand on the door.

"Any one in Manzanita can tell you."

"Tell me what!"

The woman looked up with a cunning smile.

"What about you and Mary Ingalls?"

CHAPTER XVII

THE WEIGHING IN THE BALANCE

IN the shaping of her venomous dart, the Big Swede had brought to bear all the low cunning of her kind. A child of sin, all her life had been spent in scenes where the fiercest passions of men and women, unbridled and in the full light of day, had worked themselves out in all their hideous deformities to their logical end, — lives wrecked beyond all possibility of redemption, and sudden, violent deaths. Perfectly she had learned how best to play upon these fierce passions, to raise them to their highest pitch, or to soothe them into passive satiety. Drunken carousals, bestial orgies, quivering hearts, shriveling in the flame of consuming lust, these had no more effect upon her, to arouse a sympathetic chord, than a brushwood fire upon a sheet of frozen lava.

Hence she ruled, an uncrowned queen, in every mining camp where she had deigned to set up her tinsel throne. Her rare beauty had no doubt aided in establishing her despotic sway. But she had more than this, a power of mind that, under happier surroundings, would have made her a ruler over a mightier kingdom. She herself could not have given this power a name. She simply

used the weapon which nature had placed in her hands, as blindly, unreasoningly, and unfeelingly as a tiger uses his supple strength.

She had really loved Chase, loved him without knowing what love was, and she loved him still. In his presence, she felt herself confronted with a power with which she was unacquainted, and this vague recognition filled her with a nameless, fascinating fear. Chase's unassumed indifference to her at times aroused all her evil passions to their highest pitch, only to fall into harmless ripples before the steady calm of his level eyes.

As to Chase, so far as this woman was concerned, he was clad in the impenetrable armor of utter indifference. Intimately associated for years with the lawless manifestations of frontier vice, he was as wide apart from it as are the laws of attraction and repulsion. He was as little capable of realizing the fact that he had wakened into life her dormant possibilities, as she was of giving the newborn spirit a name. And yet these two were but isolated exponents of a universal law. The whole mass of humanity, ground together by the upper and nether millstones of daily life, rich and poor, high and low, sodden vice and divine purity, mixed into an undistinguishable, shapeless mass, yet each existing untainted and unregenerated the one by the other. Beat into the finest emulsion oil and water, beat until molecule is torn from molecule, lay them aside, and without a single throe of chemical dissolution each will gather to its own. Only

the outer shells have been brought into contact ; the inner life of each has been undisturbed by attrition with the other.

In hinting to Chase the coarse rumors which had coupled his name with that of Mary Ingalls, she had clumsily used a weapon to which her hands were unaccustomed. A scalpel in the hands of the murderer will let out the life of his victim through open veins and arteries ; but only the skilled surgeon can lay bare with it the beautiful anatomy of the human body. Intuitively she had used the scalpel with Chase, rather than a dagger. Blindly, reasoning from past experiences, she had hoped to jar him from his indifference to an active recognition of herself. Never for an instant did it occur to her that this very act on her part would be the means of separating him irrevocably from her and of impelling him more strongly toward the helpless woman whom the rumors had so unjustly defamed.

At first the full import of her words had not come to him. So full had he been of noble purposes that the thought that others could place a sinister interpretation on his enforced connection with Mary Ingalls had never occurred to him.

But now ?

As with a flashing glare, the whole of the past months stood out sharp and clear.

And now ?

As the woman looked at him, the low cunning

died from her eyes. She had expected to see him burst into a storm of fury. Instead, every muscle of his face grew hard and tense. Not a word did he speak. With a slow parting glance at her, Chase walked deliberately to the door, opened it and passed out.

If Chase had appeared calm and unruffled before the Big Swede, it was only imperative necessity that made him so. To have given way to passionate resentment would have placed her on familiar ground, where she could have met him on somewhat even terms. When he passed from her presence, this restraint was removed, and he yielded himself wholly uncontrolled to his emotions.

Hitherto, his conduct towards Mary Ingalls had been impelled by strong, self-reliant manhood in the presence of a defenceless woman in trouble. He had only extended toward her the same involuntary chivalry which any true woman can claim as her own among the roughest men in a Western mining camp.

Now for the first time, the veil was torn from his eyes, and for a moment he yielded himself to the intoxication of his first love. He did not go beyond himself. It did not occur to him that his love had an objective existence, that it could not be complete in himself alone, but must be shared in and be a part of another.

He had reached his cabin. He sprang from his horse, and, throwing the reins over the hitching post, he entered the cabin and gave way to the

storm of passion that raged within him. His soul was a tiny bird beating its feeble wings to and fro in the blasts of a hurricane. The passionate waves of strong desire rose in climbing swells of "I will," only to break before the flaming sword of "Thou shalt not." It is mine! *mine!* MINE! beaten back and down before the barriers of the law of God and man. What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.

Injustice or justice was nothing to him, only for intangible, undefinable mankind. The thought blew into raging flame the fires of his passion. Had he preserved his manhood intact, only to offer it in sacrifice before this inexorable law? Was it inexorable? Surely it was not meant for him, could not be. He could not yield; he would not yield to heaven or hell his new-found love. Back and forth in the sounding corridors of his throbbing head, the conflict raged too fiercely for control by reason.

There came a lull. Bells pealed forth merrily, and inside a crowded church a wedding was taking place. With a start, he recognized in the bride the sweet face of the woman he loved. With a breaking heart he heard her solemn vow, "In sickness and in health, for better, for worse, till death us do part." The momentary vision passed away. Slowly he realized with painful effort that what he asked of his love was not hers to give. How could she give to him that which, for better or worse, she

had given to another? Even if she yielded, would she come to him the spotless woman his love had made her?

He saw it all. The very unconsciousness of his love for her, her noble, patient, unfaltering recognition of the invisible barriers that forbade with voiceless words too tender sympathy, these very things made her what she was to him, separated her forever from the passion-crowned women he had known.

Frank and open as she had assumed him to be, what an unvoiced tribute to his manhood had it been! And he had nearly wrecked it all. Even in the seclusion of his lonely cabin, his face burned hotly at the thought. He had triumphed; he knew it. The balance had wavered for a while, but it had settled, never to waver again.

It is one thing to gain intellectual victory. It is another to follow out its conditions. How could he live through it all and keep his secret to himself? It occurred to him to leave the country; but that would be desertion, cowardly desertion in her hour of sorest need. The thought was dismissed before it was fairly formulated. She would know his motive at once, and while she would doubtless respect and honor him for his action, how would it be with himself?

No! A thousand times, no! Come what would, his path of duty was plain before him and he would follow it to the end. The very thing that had

threatened him with destruction should be his strength and shield.

But there was Ingalls. His hands clenched involuntarily. He raised his head in time to see the cabin door slowly open, and Ingalls himself stood before him.

CHAPTER XVIII

PETER AND BARTHOLOMEW TAKE A HAND

"OUR lives," says Emerson, "are an apprenticeship to the fact that around every circle a greater can be drawn."

Peter's circle, while somewhat restricted as to diameter, yet had a very obvious centre, said centre being known far and wide as Sweet Springs. The Springs, with their large patch of irrigable land surrounding them, ought to have afforded both Peter and Bartholomew a sufficiently large field of action. Bartholomew, as a matter of fact, was well content, and whined a useless protest every time his restless master, shouldering the well-known pick and shovel, sallied forth in search of a circumscribing circumference. Whereat Peter, as was his wont, looked sorrowfully at his patient follower and gave voice to the motives that impelled him.

"Come, come, Bartholomew, none of that! I get enough from others without having to listen to you. You ought to have a pride in your master who has wider ambitions than just to eat and drink." Then Peter, looking compassionately at Bartholomew, added, "But then, poor fellow, you are only a dog, after all, and have a dog's way of

looking at things." With which he arose and went on to the beginning of his major circle.

If Peter was not alive to the great truth that an earnest though futile beginning is better than the contemplated arc of a greater circle, he was putting that truth to a persistent trial.

All the morning, the mountains had given back a rattling protest, as he dumped barrow after barrow of rock down the steep slope, while the phlegmatic Bartholomew dozed in peace, even when an impertinent and curious cony had whistled a quavering challenge not ten feet from his recumbent muzzle. The only response that Bartholomew deigned to give the saucy challenger was lazily to open the eye nearest him, then dreamily close it again.

"Better," argued Bartholomew, "a dinner of bacon-rind and a whole skin than fat cony and a tumble down the mountain."

Wherein we see the superiority of canine intellect, in that it practices unuttered philosophy, while his master's kind spends untold ages in putting airy phrases into loud-sounding words, and yet goes steadily on breaking his shins against the cony's stronghold. Then came forth Peter staggering along with another barrow of rocks, and, dumping them to seek their scattered predecessors, seated himself on one of the handles of the barrow and thus addressed the peaceful Bartholomew.

"Well, Bartholomew, do you feel hungry again already? I do. Come."

Peter reached up to a cleft in the rock and pulled down a brown paper parcel carefully tied. Bartholomew lazily raised himself and performed his canine genuflexions, his grace before meat, stretching out his forepaws, placing prone on them his yawning muzzle, elevating his hind quarters and waving above them a grizzled tail in a graceful *Benedicite*. This done, he walked to his master's side, sat down, and nonchalantly turned his head to the whistling cony.

"You see, my friend, all things come to him who waits, even footless bacon-rind." Then his champing jaws received the morsel his master tossed into them.

An unexpected rattle of rocks checked the cony's whistle and sent him scuttling under cover, startled Peter into rigid interrogation, but disturbed in no respect the placid Bartholomew. The rattle was soon punctuated by the grinding click of hobnailed shoes, as Ingalls, swinging from jagged points, half slipping over loose slide, hopped and scrambled down the narrow runway where Peter and the dog were taking their noon-day meal.

For once, Peter's astonishment took precedence over the laws of hospitality.

"Where did you come from?" he asked.

"Crossed the divide from Navajo," Ingalls answered, with the studied nonchalance of a fool-hardy tenderfoot, conscious of a daring feat successfully performed.

"Then are you to be thankful that you haf not gone ofer the Big Divide." Peter snorted contemptuously. "It iss written that Providence looks out for children, drunkards, and fools. It haf nothing to say of tenderfoots, unless they be already fools." Peter looked disdainfully at Ingalls. "Man alive, I haf lived in these mountains more years than you have months; and nefer before haf I known a man to cross that divide, and live to tell of it."

"That may be," answered Ingalls, with evident satisfaction; "but you know, Peter, cool-headed fellows like you and me can do things that would be sure death to a man who gets rattled."

Peter did not rise to the delicate cast.

"Ja," he grunted. "I also understand me. I saw one time a man get rattled. He rattled from way up there." He pointed to the towering cliffs above. "And he rattled and clattered till he got down there and he iss not got rattled since." He pointed to the jagged slide that reached steeply a thousand feet below them where a heaped-up wave of rock marked the level plat at timber line. "But I forgot me. Eat!" He pushed the brown paper towards Ingalls.

Bartholomew put on a look of mute disgust. The footless bacon-rind was traveling farther than his philosophy.

Ingalls ate ravenously.

"Been out of grub for two days," he explained. "Had boiled bacon skin yesterday noon, boiled

old coffee grounds this morning for breakfast. I wanted to get in one more shot this morning."

Peter mused a long time after the last remark. Ingalls, having finished his lunch, leaned back against the wall of the runway and stared down upon the peaceful mesa that stretched for miles away towards the dim, blue mountains of the north. Peter's eyes looked dreamily through bushy brows. His drooping hands hung loose and pendent from rigid arms resting on up-bended knees.

"Man alive!" he spoke pityingly, almost pleadingly. "Why should you do this?"

There was no response, and he continued:—

"You haf a fine range. You haf a most excellent wife. Each day the range brings more than enough. Why should you make your wife to live alone, spoiling her eyes with weeping for you in her loneliness?"

Ingalls made an apologetic explanation.

Peter replied indignantly:—

"She haf books? She haf music? But what are books and music when one is awfully alone?"

Ingalls laughed a little uneasily.

"You 're preaching what you don't practice, Peter." He had not replied directly to Peter, hoping for a diversion.

Peter's reply was in the line of his own thoughts, with little heed to Ingalls's words.

"Yes," he spoke musingly; "sometimes I think of these things. I have Bartholomew. He iss a

good dog. If I gif Bartholomew a bone for dinner, he eats it and goes to sleep in peace. But if I gif him two bones, he smells of this one and that one. He bites of this one and then of that. And then he drops that, and goes back to the other. And so back and forth, till he haf enough. But it iss the too much that gifs him the trouble. He does not go steadily to sleep. That other bone disturbs him. Then he gets up and digs a hole and he buries the other bone, and he goes away and lies down to sleep, and then gets up and goes back and digs out the bone and buries it elsewhere." He looked up sharply at Ingalls. He saw only a look of resigned impatience, and he went on, "Oh, man!—man! That other bone! It worries Bartholomew and he takes no peace." Peter's eyes had lost their dreamy look and bent on Ingalls, sharp and piercing. "Yes, that bone too much spoils Bartholomew."

"Well, what of it?" Ingalls tried to hide his impatience under a forced smile. He made as if to go on, but Peter broke in with a sweeping gesture.

"If he thought there was a vein of bones in this mountain, it would be the death of him. He would haf no peace till he had dug into the vein. And then?"

"That's too much, Peter. Don't ask me. I'm listening; that's enough."

Peter went on:—

"Man alive, that foolish dog would take out

every bone, one by one. He would bury one here and another there, and his peace of mind would be gone forever. He would wake up in the night, thinking coyotes were nosing out one cache, and curs were digging out others, and his peace would be no more. Yes, Bartholomew iss a good dog, but too many bones will spoil any dog. Bartholomew haf lived with me many years, and haf learned of me to be philosophical. He seems not to know whether I am dogs or he iss folks. Gif him too many bones, and the dog will break out all ofer."

"Where did you learn all that, Peter?" Ingalls asked sarcastically.

"Me?" Peter spoke excitedly. "Me learn that? I nefer learned that. No one efer learns such things."

Ingalls shook his head.

"You 're too much for me, Peter."

"*Ja!*" answered Peter excitedly; "*ja!* Iss it not so? Haf I not already told you? If it was not so, you would not make so much damn fools of yourselves." Peter sprang to his feet and pointed to the tunnel. "You see that tunnel? That iss seven hundred feet of long, and twenty years of old. I do it all of myself." He smote his breast. "There iss a big mine there. I haf reasoned it all out of myself. Efery year I make of it more of a tunnel."

"You 're loco, Peter. You 'll never live to see that mine." He rose. "This talk 's mighty interesting, Peter, but it won't take me to Manzanita

and back with a load of grub. So long!" And he strode away.

"Look out that worse talk better understood does n't keep you there." Peter sat down, shaking his head dejectedly at Bartholomew, who was nosing the empty lunch paper. "Bartholomew, we must make a visit to the little lady. She must not think you and I are forgetful of her." Peter rose as he spoke, and, packing his scattered tools on the empty barrow, he trundled it into the mouth of the tunnel. He rolled up a blanket, slung it over his shoulder, and started down the zigzag trail.

The little gnome-like old man humped and hitched along through the stunted spruce, wind-swept and shredded, and Bartholomew, with wagging head and slowly waving tail, beat time to the lurching march. It was nearly ten o'clock at night when Peter descended from the rolling mesa into the box cañon of Dry Creek. It was too late to go to the Ingalls's ranch house, and, in spite of the knowledge that he would find a cordial welcome at the herder's cabin, he would not think of disturbing Chase. He pushed into a thick clump of piñons, rolled himself in his blanket and went to sleep.

Bright and early the following morning, he resumed his tramp. Through the dusty haze of slanting sunbeams he could see the little adobe, and, beyond, the cañon widening out to meet the Paradox, and still beyond, clothed in royal purple, the stately La Sals.

Mary had also risen early, as was her habit.

She was trying to deaden unpleasant thoughts by busying herself about the house. She had heard nothing from or of her husband since his departure, hence she had only forebodings instead of positive grounds of anxiety. In a way, she was making a serious mistake, but only as far as her own peace of mind was concerned. She was now positive that her influence over her husband had never been great. She felt certain that it was growing less. She could not rest in the consciousness that she was blameless, that nothing but his own efforts could save him. She was grieving over the past and seeking for a remedy. There was constantly a dumb, numbing consciousness accentuated by sharp throbs of definite memory. There is always compensation in acute mental distress. So long as the balance is swinging, there is hope. When it settles, hope is dead. Then comes the time that souls are tried. The long, dreary stretch of life, the monotonous beating in and out of light and darkness, the merciless procession of fore-known events! Blessed is the hand of God that hangs before our eyes the veil that shuts out the future!

She was startled by a knock at the door. Opening it, she was confronted by Peter and Bartholomew.

"Good-morning, lady!" saluted Peter. "Bartholomew and I haf come to pay our respects. Bartholomew, where are your manners, sir?"

Thus adjured, Bartholomew seated himself and deprecatingly stretched out a dusty paw. Ceremo-

nies were the bane of Bartholomew's life. Mary returned Peter's cordial greeting, and, dropping on one knee, clasped the shaggy head of Bartholomew in her arms.

"You dear old dog," she cried. "I'm so glad to see you."

Bartholomew endured the greeting passively. He had forgotten one thing. Sentiment, as well as ceremony, was a bore.

Mary sprang lightly to her feet.

"You must be desperately hungry," she said. "I know you have n't had breakfast. Neither have I. You see," she continued in a lower voice, "Mrs. Hurley does n't like to get up. Young people like you and me cannot sleep so late."

As Mary busied herself about breakfast, she kept up a running fire of talk addressed first to Peter and then to Bartholomew. Diversion from a protracted strain was evident in every word and action. There was more cheerfulness than had come to her before for many a day. A very small stone will make a very large ripple in a quiet pool.

"You are under obligations to Mr. Chase for your breakfast, Peter. He brought me some fresh antelope, yesterday. But how did you happen to come over from the Germania?"

"For two reasons, lady; but the other iss of no account. Bartholomew and I wished to pay our respects to you."

Mary was interested to know his other reason, but she forbore to question. Peter had made up

his mind to consult Chase in regard to Ingalls's Navajo claim. He had no intention of saying a word to Mary. He knew very well that she was hoping through him to hear of her husband. Peter was no diplomat. He went straight at what he wanted. He went as straight away from whatever he did not want. After his meeting with Ingalls, he had completely expressed his idea to Bartholomew, "Perhaps the little lady will need us." The end was that he came as straight to Dry Creek as the intervening topography would allow. He had nothing to say of Ingalls that would reassure his wife, so he studiously avoided any reference to him.

Mary, on her part, was sure that Peter would know of her husband's movements, and that, if Peter had anything good to say of them, he would be the first to report it to her. Her question was answered without asking. So great, however, was her desire for positive knowledge that she could not forbear to give Peter the broadest hint if, perchance, his memory had failed him. Any news of him that did not forbid hope would encourage it. She framed her suggestion accordingly.

"I've forgotten to ask you about your mine, Peter."

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"On account of thiss mine, lady, long ago people called me crazy. Then I was alone. Now I haf much company."

"And that means?" she asked.

"That efery one iss now crazy. The mountains

are shot full of empty holes." Peter rose as he spoke, and, picking up his hat, started for the door. "With your kind permission, lady, I will satisfy myself that everything is in good order."

She smiled assent, and Peter and Bartholomew passed out. She had failed to draw from Peter any reference to her husband. That he knew where he was, she had no doubt. The shadows, momentarily dispelled, returned blacker than ever. She went to her desk and wrote steadily for a long time. It was a passionate appeal to Ingalls to return. The message contained no hint of reproach. She had no idea of the real gulf that separated them, no idea of the actions, of the associates on account of which, had she known them, the letter would never have been written. She went to the door. Peter, with his blankets on his back, was sitting on a boulder.

"Peter," she said gently; "I have a great favor to ask of you."

"It is already granted, lady." Peter looked up to the face turned towards him. There was a light in his eyes which none besides Mary and Chase had ever seen.

"I have an important letter for my husband. Will you see that he gets it as soon as possible?"

"It shall go from my hands to his, lady."

Peter took the letter, and, wrapping it in a paper, placed it in his pocket.

"Come, Bartholomew," he said. "Now we will go."

CHAPTER XIX

THE BRAYING IN THE MORTAR

CHASE had just come through the crucial test of his life. The sight of Ingalls brought him down to earth with a crash. As he looked at him, all the feeling of attraction that once possessed him seemed to change to loathing. The headstrong impulses of the man had left their traces on the handsome face. The mobile lines, once weak with indecisive deference, had grown hard and strong. There was the jaunty bearing of the man who had bidden farewell to his conscience to the end that he might, undisturbed, take council with his desires. There was strength in the place of weakness, but the strength inspired loathing rather than respect.

Ingalls approached Chase with insolent, almost patronizing, familiarity; but his assurance broke before the contempt which Chase hardly strove to conceal. He stood for an instant, wavering and undecided. The look of bravado left his shifting eyes. Chase motioned him to a seat.

"How's the prospect?" he asked.

"No good," answered Ingalls. "I struck the vein I was cross-cutting to, three days ago, and I've been drifting on it ever since; but it's no

good. It does n't show a color. It does n't even assay."

"Are you going back to it?" Chase inquired.

"No; it's no use. I saw Peter at the Germania yesterday. I told him I was going to Manzanita for grub, but I was n't. I had business there, and I thought I might get track of something else."

"Anything in particular?" Chase spoke as one having a point in mind toward which he was leading.

"No. To-morrow's Christmas, you know. There'll be a lot of prospectors there for a big blow-out. There'll be plenty there with neither money nor credit. If any of them have got a good thing, a fellow can get in on it easy."

"Suppose you don't find anything; what then?" Chase was sitting with one arm on the table, absently twirling a pencil.

Ingalls was getting restless. He knew Chase well enough to know that his questions were not pointless. He could not see their lead, and the fact irritated him.

"I'm going down to the La Sals." His voice was growing dogged.

"To the Snow Flake?" asked Chase, with the same apparent indifference.

Ingalls started. An angry flush mounted to his face as he looked sharply at Chase. He saw no malice in the impenetrable eyes. His own dropped.

"No. To the Extension," he replied more sullenly. "I've got a good chance there."

Chase's attitude changed. The pencil ceased twirling; it was firmly grasped.

"It has come to that, then?" He was looking steadily at Ingalls.

"To what?" Ingalls burst out impatiently. "I wish you'd drop this confounded play-acting and come to the point, if you've got any."

"You've come to taking chances?" Chase ignored Ingalls's last words.

"Well, what of it? What if I have?"

"Only desperate men take chances."

"Don't preach." Ingalls spoke petulantly.

"I'm not preaching." Chase made an impatient gesture. "I'm stating facts. Are you ready to stand either as a desperate man or as a traitor to your past? Just answer that."

Ingalls spoke with a wavering attempt at bravado.

"That is n't fair. I'm not limited to that for a choice. I don't see that, simply because I've gone into prospecting, I'm either a desperate man or a traitor."

"Then I'll tell you why." Chase's eyes had a set, hard look. "You've had a fine education. Your home life has been of the best. Your friends have been those of whom any man might be proud. You came out here with an excellent start in life."

Ingalls started to interrupt, but Chase quieted him with a gesture.

"These have imposed obligations upon you," he continued ; "but, unless you choose to recognize them, they are but ropes of sand. You have given to yourself no promise to respect them. If it ended there, no one would have a right to say a word ; but it does n't. And the reason is your own deliberate choice. You married one of the best women God ever made. You offered her all your past, you promised her all your future. Before God and man you vowed to love her, shield her, to leave all the world and cling to her alone."

Ingalls sprang to his feet with livid face.

"Look here, Chase, you 're going too far !"

Chase leveled his eyes at Ingalls. His face was jagged with deep-drawn lines.

"I'm going farther," he said. "You've given the lie to the promises of your past life. You've trampled your friends under foot. You've cast in your lot with adventurers, with gamblers, with nameless women. You've dragged your wife to their level. The one you promised to love, you treat with cold neglect ; the one you promised to protect, you have threatened with want ; in the place of honor, you have exposed her to the vile attacks of those who curse the earth by living. Stand out and look at yourself !" Chase's words were resonant with contempt.

Ingalls was writhing. He had known all this before, but he had excused it. He had rounded the hard, sharp corners of insistent faults with the plastic clay of good intentions. When disagree-

able realities had pressed too hard for recognition, he had softened the strain with rosy dreams of the future. He tried to get away from Chase's withering words, but he could not. Then the enormity of his conduct, held back for an instant, rolled forward and overwhelmed him. Chase was watching him, but there was no pity in his eyes.

"You put it pretty strong, Chase." The voice was spiritless and broken.

"Not as strong as the case itself," Chase answered pitilessly.

Ingalls spoke without spirit.

"I'll admit that, and not for the sake of argument, either. But you have stated it as if the two things stood alone, and they don't. I have already forfeited my wife's love and respect. I have done more. I have incurred financial obligations which must be met. To meet them to-day would leave me penniless and homeless. My only chance is a lucky strike in mining. It's too late for anything else."

Chase's eyes blazed with wrathful impatience.

"Damn it! Is anything too late, as long as you're alive?"

Ingalls was startled by the compressed fury that burst through every word.

"I've made mistakes that can't be remedied. It's too late."

"Mistakes!" Chase broke out again. "Every man's life is a tissue of mistakes. Any one that is n't a fool knows that. It's the arrant coward

who lies down under them and calls them irreparable. If you're a man, get up and live them down."

Ingalls was thoroughly cowed.

"That sounds good, but I can't see how it's going to help me."

"If you see you need help, that's one point gained." Chase spoke more restrainedly.

Ingalls shook his head.

"I don't know where to begin."

"Go back to what you said a minute ago. You said you had forfeited your wife's love and respect. Why?"

"I" — Ingalls hesitated painfully. "I don't exactly know why."

"Then that's the first thing you want to find out."

"But I don't know."

"You do know. At least you know that, if you have n't lost her respect, you deserve to. Knowing so much, you know why. You've made a fool of yourself, a braying, empty-headed ass."

Ingalls flared up, but the consciousness of truth laid hold upon him and the swelling resentment died away. Chase went on: —

"That's why. But I can tell you one thing. A man that makes a fool of himself and drops it, deserves respect and gets it. It's only the one who makes a fool of himself and stays one that's hopeless. Why don't you go home like a man and own up everything. Go through the whole nasty



business categorically and ask for a new trial. You won't tell your wife anything she does n't know already, but it will do you good."

Ingalls was silent for a long time. Chase was watching him. He saw the face turn a burning red. It was the shame of acknowledgment, of wounded vanity, not the manly consciousness of wrong-doing that was upon him.

"Why not start in with me?" Chase went on half contemptuously. "It may make it easier."

Ingalls flirted his head with an attempt at bravado.

"Oh, well," he said; "it is n't much, after all. Any man is liable to run into debt once in a while."

"Well?"

"You know, too, in this infernal country a man can't raise a cent except on a mortgage." Again he paused, and his eyes wavered towards Chase, only to slide away again.

"I'm listening."

"And," continued Ingalls, "he's got to pay good interest, too."

"Yes." Chase spoke evenly.

Ingalls sprang to his feet, his eyes flashing.

"Damn you, Chase! Do you want to drag me through the whole length of this dirty puddle? Did I treat you this way, when you came to me, a dead-broke hobo?" He turned and started for the door.

Chase rose also and slowly leaned against it. Ingalls did not pause, but, advancing threateningly, said:—

"That's a dangerous thing to do. What do you mean by it?"

"It means this. You and I are going to have a clean-up right here. Just make up your mind to that. Just remember, too, that it's only between you and me."

Ingalls tried to resist, but in vain. He stood for a moment irresolute, then dropped back into his chair.

"What do you want?" he asked briefly.

"I want it all," answered Chase.

Ingalls only looked sullen.

"You say you borrowed money at a high rate of interest. Were there any unusual conditions in the mortgage? You gave a mortgage, of course."

"I don't know that they are unusual for this God-forgotten country," replied Ingalls.

"What were the conditions?" pursued Chase.

"Interest five per cent. a month, payable quarterly, non-payment of interest for two consecutive quarters constitutes forfeiture without recourse," Ingalls recited monotonously.

"You must have been hard up when you gave that mortgage." Chase's tone was sarcastic.

"Who holds the paper?"

"The Big Swede," answered Ingalls shortly.

"Don't you know," went on Chase, "that there's not a court in the United States that would enforce such an instrument without your wife's signature?"

"No court will ever be asked to enforce it," re-

plied Ingalls hotly. "If I can't pay up, I'll take my medicine. That's all there is to it."

"In other words," continued Chase, "you place your obligations to a harlot before your duty to your wife."

Ingalls flared up again, but Chase waved him aside.

"I suppose that you don't chance to know that the Snow Flake, where you spent your money, was a salted prospect." Again Chase restrained Ingalls, then went on, "I also assume that you are ignorant of the fact that the Big Swede stood in with Smutty Mike and his Snow Flake, and then divided with him."

Ingalls blazed, as he sprang to his feet.

"Do you mean to say that they played me for such an easy mark as that?"

"That's not all. Listen. This is an old game of the Big Swede's, to lure a man into her power, get him involved for all he's worth, and then turn him loose."

Ingalls's face showed conflicting emotions raging strongly, indecisive, wounded vanity, bitter resentment, and wavering suspicion of Chase. Finally he spoke:—

"That's too thin, Chase. You've overdone it. The Big Swede's no fool. She never would have let it out, if she had done it."

Chase's voice flowed, thin and even.

"Do you happen to know," he went on, "that there's a law on the statute books of Colorado

making it a felony to salt, or cause to be salted, any prospect or sample? These are not the exact words, but they cover the point."

Ingalls broke in eagerly: —

"Then all I've got to do is to prove that the Snow Flake was salted" —

"Don't jump," Chase interrupted. "Affirmation and proof are two very different things. The first is very easy, the second is very difficult, and both are liable to cost blood."

Again Ingalls's face flushed.

"Did the Big Swede blow on me?" he asked excitedly. "If she did" —

"The Big Swede's too sly for empty nonsense like blowing. I happened to be in a position to make it worth her while to tell me. That's all."

Ingalls started to interrupt. His suspicion had fled.

"I think you will see, Ingalls," Chase went on coldly, "that I have not dragged all this out of you for amusement, nor for the sake of humiliating you. You've made no end of a fool of yourself, and it's a very healthy thing for you to realize it. So far as that's concerned, you have n't told me a thing I did n't know before. If you want to change, your best way is first to get a clear idea of your position. Then you can mend intelligently. You've made a good beginning. The facts are not particularly attractive, or in any way flattering to your pride."

Ingalls winced.

"Now for the second part," Chase went on. "If I can show you a way to free yourself honorably from the Big Swede and your other entanglements, will you cut the whole gang and quit this prospecting? It's up to you, yes or no."

Ingalls was quivering with excitement.

"Do you mean to tell me I have a way out of this mess?" he cried.

"That is n't what I said," answered Chase. "I asked you if you'd turn right about, if I could show you a way. Don't miss the point. Will you do your part, if I do mine?"

"I will."

"Without any reservations, will you in the future be guided by your wife?"

Ingalls's face fell.

"A man can't blot himself out entirely, Chase. You know that."

"You've come pretty close to doing it," Chase remarked dryly.

Ingalls ignored the last remark.

"I'll do anything in reason," he answered guardedly.

"I don't think your wife will ask anything beyond." Chase rose as he spoke, and, opening his trunk, took from it a bundle of papers. Selecting one, he handed it to Ingalls. It was the chattel mortgage covering his herd of goats and other enumerated articles of personal property, and his real estate. Across the back was the following indorsement: —

For value received, I hereby transfer to William Chase, his heirs or assigns forever, all my right and title to the appurtenances, each and several, of the within instrument.

Signed HILDA BERGSTROM.

Attest : ALFRED TICE, *Notary Public*.

MANZANITA, MONTROSE COUNTY, COLORADO,
December 23, 18—.

Ingalls's hand shook, as he returned the paper to Chase.

"How did you get this?" he asked.

Chase did not reply, but handed Ingalls several other papers. They were the notes which Ingalls had made out to the Big Swede. Each was canceled.

"You see I've a pretty strong hold on them both."

"Why don't you put them over the road?" There was revenge in Ingalls's eyes.

"Because, after they'd served their time, they'd be free. As it is, I have a hold on them that they can't shake off."

Ingalls's eyes were downcast, his face had grown deathly pale.

"Does this satisfy you that I can keep my word?"

Ingalls looked up sullenly.

"I hope you're satisfied, yourself, now. You've got everything in your own hands."

"If you'd thought a moment, you would n't have said that."

Ingalls showed a struggle between humbled pride and a sense of justice.

"I guess you 're right. But no man with a grain of spirit can allow another man to manage his affairs as if he were a child. How would you like it yourself?"

Chase ignored the obvious challenge. It was not in consonance with his plans to be put on the defensive.

"I think I've shown you how to get clear of the Big Swede. In fact, you are clear. That, however, is only half. The next thing is to get you squarely on your feet. If you're ready, I'll go on."

"All right." The assent was not hearty, but it did not seem wise to Chase to press that point.

"In regard to that mortgage, you're right. I have got the whole thing in my own hands, and I don't intend to give it up for nothing." Ingalls's mouth tightened, but Chase went on. "I've got two propositions to make to you. The first: I'll turn this mortgage over to you on condition that you deed your entire property to your wife. Second: I'll hold the whole in trust, turning it over to your wife at the end of five years. There's only one other condition. You must decide at once."

Ingalls was silent, evidently because he could not trust himself to speak. Chase waited patiently.

"Is it a go?" he finally asked.

There was no hesitancy now. Ingalls's face was glowing.

"Either one you say. No one needs to know

about this transfer. There's big money in this range. I saw it pretty clearly, when I thought I'd lost it. I'll push it now. You'll stay, won't you? I tell you, Chase, we'll manage this range for Mary and start one of our own."

Chase felt sick at heart over the childish enthusiasm. A cat-boat can go about in its own length; a man-of-war sweeps the arc of a great circle.

"All right. We can fix the papers now, and you can give them to your wife to-morrow for a Christmas present."

"Not too fast, Chase. I've got to go to Manzanita to-night. To-morrow I must start down to the La Sals. I have got to finish an assessment there and record it. Make it New Year's, and I'll be with you." He rose as he spoke, and started for the door.

"Go home to-night." Chase's voice was strange, as if he were forcing himself to speak against his will. "I know more than I can tell you. Your wife needs you."

But Ingalls was already at the door with his blankets on his shoulder.

"New Year's it is," he said. "I won't go into any new venture. I've sure got the Extension of the Royal Flush. There's a dozen ready to jump me, if the assessment is n't finished. New Year's it is." And he strode jauntily away toward Manzanita.

Chase was as near a state of nervous irritability as his even temperament ever allowed him to get.

He was not angry at Ingalls; Ingalls was not worth that. It was at himself. He went over in his mind their first meeting. Ingalls was a good-looking man, affable and attractive. He had a way of gracefully anticipating one's line of thought and of unexpectedly saying just what his companion was about to say. Without close analysis, he gave one's mentality a kind of cushioning. One's mental bones might be ever so slightly adiposed; with him, there was no danger of bruising them against unexpected corners. He anticipated one's path and cleared it of obstructions. When one arrived at his point, he plumped into a mossy seat. It is refreshing at times to sit without being actively conscious of that on which one is sitting.

Yes, Ingalls had attracted Chase for a time. Later, he had accepted him at his wife's apparent valuation.

Had Ingalls remained in the East, constituted as he was, his fatal weaknesses might never have shown. It is more than likely that his wife, even, would never have been actively conscious of them. She would probably have lived a forced life of mental anæmia. Not feeling the necessities of a nobler nature, she would remain unconscious of the fact that she had been defrauded. In the East, moral rectitude and high standing without wealth is conventionally more generally esteemed than wealth without them. There is thus a kind of public backbone to which gelatinous individuals can adhere and delude themselves and, to a certain

extent, others, into the belief that their borrowed rigidity is a part of themselves. In the West, these conditions are wholly reversed. Strength and virility are the shrines of worship. The weak stumble and fall to rise no more. Natural selection, survival of the fittest, these natural laws here work unhampered.

The wide-open doors of vice, the pitfalls of the weak, are wide open, not because the men are more gross and passionate than elsewhere, but because action and reaction must be equal. High-tension action requires high-tension relaxation. Men driven to the verge of mental exhaustion are lifted from the wearing rut by a drunken orgy, wearied in body, but, for a time at least, in no way impaired as to their minds.

With men of Ingalls's type, the case is wholly different. They are to the last degree imitative. With them, agitation and excitement are mistaken for mental tension, and to them a debauch is fatally weakening. Strain implies steady coördination and collaboration; excitement, the aimless attrition of one force against another. Through this chaotic storm of unbridled passion, men of Chase's type move as gods. Their strength is not the unharnessed flash of the thunderbolt, but the steady pressure of the dynamo. Coördinated, balanced, nothing permanently diverts them from their well-defined goal.

As Chase sat and watched the retreating figure of Ingalls bobbing over the inequalities of the

trail, he was filled for the moment with a deep disgust. It was a positive relief when the door opened to admit Bartholomew, who seated himself and stretched forth an apologetic paw with a side wag of his head. His whole expression seemed to say : —

“Of course this is only conventionality, but conventionalities are the oil of life.” Having performed this duty, he laid himself at Chase’s feet.

“Man, dear, I came all this long way to see you, and I find you far away. Do you soon return?”

“Here I am.” Chase spoke cordially.

“Yes,” answered Peter meditatively. “It iss always so. You are of those who do not need to hear me. But those who do need? — Their ears are full of wax.”

He waved aside his mood impatiently. “Haf you seen that Ingalls?”

“Yes. He left here about an hour ago.”

“His head was high in the air. Was it not so?”

“Yes,” answered Chase.

“That man,” grunted Peter; “he makes me to think of those tumbling toys the children play with. They always come up straight. They haf lead in their pants, but none in their heads.”

Chase laughed.

“That ’s about it, Peter. I gave him a combing just now; but it ’s no good, I think.”

“You ’re not disappointed? No?”

Chase shook his head.

"No. Yet must I look for that Ingalls." He took from his blouse the letter which Mary had given him. "At Manzanita?" He looked at Chase.

Chase nodded in reply.

Bartholomew rose and trotted after his master.

Chase busied himself about his duties. He moved mechanically. His mind was far away. Once he paused and looked down the valley. Guarded by the slanting shafts of the setting sun, he could see the little adobe. He half made up his mind to ride down to the range house, but — There was the encounter with the Big Swede! He turned and entered the cabin. He went through the form of preparing and eating his supper. Then, stretching himself on his bed, he fell into a long, troubled sleep.

How long he slept he knew not; but he awakened with an awful terror. His ears were ringing with a passionate appeal for help. As he sprang up, he seemed to see in the straggling moonlight the form of Mary Ingalls. Her arms were outstretched for help, in her eyes the terror of death. Only an instant; then it was gone!

He rushed from the cabin. Without saddle or bridle, he sprang on his horse and rode as the wind. He knew not why, only that Mary had called him. At the gate of the ranch house was his first pause. Before the beating hoofs had ceased to sound, he was at the door.

CHAPTER XX

THE HOUSE OF THE STRANGE WOMAN

It was up to Manzanita to make a record.

Less than a year old as a mining camp, there was no staid reputation to live down, but a clean page ready for its crimson mark. As a mining camp, Manzanita had an ideal location. On the north, the San Miguel, on the south and west the Dolores, with their steep-walled cañons, cut off the valley of the Paradox from the high mesa. By the way of Dry Creek was the only entrance. Across the line in Utah, the rugged, snow-clad La Sals forbade an entrance from the west, even if the barren desert beyond had not imposed an impassable barrier. So for years cowboys had trailed from the Paradox, through the box cañon of Dry Creek, up Manzanita Pass, and so on to the mesa, as the Indians had trailed before them for unknown ages.

Since the discovery of the Royal Flush, heavy freight wagons had ground the soft red sandstone into choking dust, and packs of burros and strings of mules kept this dust suspended in mid-air in stifling clouds over the new-born town. In converging lines, streams of prospectors, gamblers, — professional and tin-horn, — abandoned women, speculators and tradesmen, came perforce to this

one spot, some to stay, others to pass on into the mountains, but all animated by one consuming passion, the hope of sudden wealth.

On either side of the dusty wagon trail were grotesque structures, mushroom tents and pretentious buildings. Piles of lumber, stacks of corrugated iron, loads of merchandise of every description, each dumped within its boundary of stakes or stone monuments, and around each pile bustled like swarming ants coatless men, hats on back of heads, dividing their time between pitching tents, spiking boards, and waiting on customers.

Pretentious Delmonicos as to sign were preparing rancid steaks and jaundiced bread cooked on pipeless stoves, served on dry-goods boxes on wall-less and roofless floors. Here the ribs of a gorgeous saloon were reaching in air around plate-glass bars and showy decanters, and amidst thumping hammers and rattling iron the red-faced proprietor was serving refreshments to the thirsty, beaming, meanwhile, on a facetious sign which announced that, during the process of housing, an accident policy would be issued with every drink.

On this Christmas eve, the bustle of preparation had given way; the harvest was ripe and the sickle was ready to thrust in and reap.

It was yet early evening, but the revel had already begun. Hissing gasoline, smoking torches, brilliant lamps, lighted in strong relief hatless, coatless, and collarless men, against a glittering background of shining bottles and sparkling mir-

rors ; shone on uncouth men, ragged and unkempt, lined up before brass-bound mahogany bars. Prospectors with promising leads, prospectors with all yet before them, cowboys from lonely months with stampeding herds, poured from the same bottle long life to what is, success to what may be, and damnation to what had been and was bound to be. Down went the scorching fluid, up went the drooping spirits ; then a waver and rush to greet with wild howls a belated line of stragglers, or with frantic yells a loping cowboy, with fluttering chaps and peaked sombrero, holding aloft flashing guns that belched and cracked a sharp *staccato* in the quavering din.

These were but preludes to the night yet before them, at gaming-tables and dance-halls. There were those who could not harvest their limitations, and these were huddled in corners, rolled under tables, or kicked out into the dusty street, dead to what had been or what might be, locked in senseless, dreamless, rouseless sleep.

This was the scene and this the hour which Fate had timed for the arrival of Ingalls. Before his interview with Chase, he had been utterly depressed. He needed a wild carouse to stir him up. He was either a worm of the dust, or lord of the universe. The talk with Chase had restored him to his kingdom. As he trudged along towards the town, his face fairly glowed with the spirit of his high resolutions born of the opportunity which Chase had offered him.

He really did not need Chase's help, but it was generous of him to offer it. Chase had done him a good turn in getting him out of the clutches of the Big Swede; he would show him that he appreciated it. The Extension was a sure winner. He would get the necessary supplies and start at once. Then he would return to Mary on New Year's eve. What a time they would have! How Mary's eyes would kindle, as he showed her the rich ore from the Extension! All his hopes would be fulfilled, his course of action would be justified. How proud she would be of him! How sweet and restful it would be to her, after her doubts and fears, to know that, after all, her husband's eyes had pierced the veil that blinded her woman's prevision!

His basket of fragile glassware was dangerously near his spurning feet.

The first part of his resolution was scrupulously kept. As he entered the town, he went straight to a store and asked for a week's supply of grub. He would be back in time to settle. But the unfeeling man of pork and beans "wa'n't keepin' no damned tick shop." With a few lofty suggestions to the lord of the pork-barrel, as to how the time would come when he would be proud to acknowledge that he had once staked the owner of the great Extension, he passed grimly and loftily through invitations to irrigate, from one store to another, to the same purpose. Then he offered an indefinite interest, then a quarter, then a half

in the Extension, only to be informed that the proprietor "wa'n't takin' no chances with a tender-foot pick-rastler."

Ingalls was beginning to be despondent. He jingled uneasily the few coins in his pocket. Irresolute for a moment, he finally turned towards the broad light of the club-room of the Miners' Rest.

He carelessly returned the sarcastic greeting of the Big Swede, swept by tables of impassive poker players, stalked by the faro banks with high-perched checkers, and paused before the roulette. There was something inspiriting in the clatter and whirr, as the ball spun around the even wheel, the tense excitement that bent the players as the lessening momentum of the ball threw it hopping and clattering into the spinning wheel, the nonchalant "Thirty-Six, Red!" as the croupier with a single motion thrust his losses into eager hands and swept his gains into growing stacks of shining coin.

Here was his chance! He threaded his arm through the packed line and placed two silver dollars on the "double ought." Again the rattle and whirr, again the hopping clatter, till the ball finally rested. "Double ought"! And seventy dollars were shoved to his trembling hand. Caution whispered; but the whisper was drowned. Some insane impulse compelled him. He again placed his money on the "double ought," and again he won. Two thousand, four hundred and fifty dollars! Why could he not stop? The crowd parted, and,

flushed and dizzy, he was close to the table. One hundred on the "double ought," the balance on all kinds of numbered black and red. Others followed his lead. The table was covered with coins. An unvoiced whisper went round the room, tables were deserted, dances broken up, all peering and tiptoeing to see the bank broken.

Again the rattling whirr, again "double ought." Three thousand, five hundred dollars! Would nothing else win? A moment's hesitation, then the whole glittering heap was staked on the fateful number. Pile after pile was pushed around it with trembling hands. The dealer glanced at the table and at his reserve in the drawer. Only for an instant. Then with steady hand he threw the ball. The sharp clatter was succeeded by the droning whirr. Would it never stop? Faces, with tense, staring eyes, bent, chalk-white and still. Nothing but the droning whirr! Such a strain could not be long endured. Once again the ball clattered and hopped. The impassive croupier turned a listless face. "Three, Black!"

The charm was broken. The crowd melted from the table. It was good fun while it lasted; but it was over, and the drinking and dancing and shouting were renewed.

Mechanically Ingalls accepted the handful of bar checks which the croupier passed him, and turned away. Nothing was real or tangible. He had a strange, distended feeling as if floating, floating, and his uncertain steps beat on yielding

air. The shouts of revelry sounded like distant surges breaking in hollow caves. A firm hand was laid on his far-away arm, and he floated in answer to the impulse.

"Pull up, old man. Yer hard hit, but a few drinks 'll fix ye." Tough Nut's voice rumbled in his ears.

Then he stood before the bar and an empty shell of hand and arm poured liquid fire into an empty, shell-like body.

Again an impelling pressure and he moved in response. Across the waving, undulating floor into a swinging chair before an empty table. With a sigh, his head fell upon his arms outstretched on the table. Around him, the shouting and the beating of many feet rolled in hollow cadence to his swimming senses.

In another part of the room, Smutty Mike was leading a boisterous revel. He had struck a rich pocket in the Snow Flake, and, in consequence, was in high favor. Unlimited treats on his part made his word law for the time. His eyes fell on the recumbent Ingalls.

"There's the sneaking sucker that thought he'd got pinched, and squealed. Let's give him a turn."

With a kick the overturned table spun across the room, and Ingalls was pulled and pushed and kicked and rolled by half-drunken girls led by Smutty Mike. A bucket of icy water was brought and dashed full in the face of the senseless man.

As if struck by an electric shock, Ingalls sprang to his feet. His stupor was gone. In his wild eyes there gleamed the unchained fury of a maniac. They rested on the leering face of Smutty Mike.

Mike threw back his head.

“Mary had a little lamb,
His fleece was white as snow,
Oh, no! Oh, no!
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go.
Oh, no! Oh, no!”

Every voice took up the mocking cadence: —

“Oh, no! Oh, no!”

Ingalls's face was livid.

“You low-lived whelp!” he shrieked; “I'll have your heart's blood for that.”

He sprang towards Mike with an oath. Mike's face was devilish. He took a half step backward; from his leveled weapon belched a flash and a roar. His aim was not steady; only a bloody welt across Ingalls's face was the result.

Guns were drawn from a dozen holsters, knives flashed, and shrieks of women mingled with deep curses of the men.

“Fight! Fight!”

In answer, hurrying feet swept from every part of the room. Tables and chairs were overthrown, games were deserted; all crowded to the wavering circle that hemmed the two men struggling in detaining hands, — Ingalls and Mike, — struggling, panting, cursing, swinging, swaying, in clinging hands.

"Give 'em room!"

"Let 'em fight it out!"

"Stand back!"

"Fair play!"

Blows were given and taken, reeling men were trampled under foot, shrieking girls were hurled aside or fell moaning and crying to the floor. Cool-headed gamblers stooped behind barriers or fell prone, to be out of the way of chance shots. Only an unmoved master spirit could still the swelling storm.

Calm as a marble fury, the Big Swede swept into the tossing riot. Men and women shrank before her with bended arms, as if to turn a threatening blow. Before her, advancing, every voice was hushed. Not a word did she speak. She only looked. She stood before Ingalls and pointed to the door. Half cowed, he obeyed her unvoiced bidding.

At the door, with one hand stretched out, he turned.

"Go home," she said; "go home to your little Mary."

With Ingalls, her mocking voice broke the spell.

She stood with one hand resting lightly on the bar.

"You essence of hell, you 're to blame for this!"

"Go home to your little Mary. Her fleece is n't as white as it was, but you 're a pair. Go home!"

He sprang towards her with uplifted hand.

"Oh, you would, would you?" She reached under the bar.

Her grasp was uncertain; the weapon dropped from her hand. Before she could stoop, Ingalls had drawn his own and fired. Without a moan she slowly sank to the floor.

With wide-open eyes Ingalls stared at the swelling crimson pool.

"This iss bad work! Ride for your life! Go! Ride!"

With a backward pressure on Ingalls, Peter faced the dazed crowd that with staring eyes stood hushed in the presence of death.

"Woe! woe unto you who dwell in the house of the strange woman! Her feet go down to death! Her steps take hold on hell! Hear me while it iss not too late!"

His thin gray hair half veiled the solemn eyes that glowed with prophetic fervor. Only a moment he held the awe-struck throng.

The awe of death gave way to the wild passion for revenge.

"Catch him! Lynch him!"

Peter did not forget another mission. Quick as light he sprang through the half-open door, shut it, and thrust his staff through the iron staples.

Ingalls was riding madly down the street.

The doors were already swelling and shrinking before the impact of the maddened throng within.

Peter hurried to each of the dozen horses. A sweep of his knife set them free, a stinging blow

sent them squealing and kicking in a wild gallop. He sprang into the saddle of the last as the straining doors gave way with a crash. Through them poured a throng of howling, shrieking, cursing men.

CHAPTER XXI

THE RIDE THROUGH THE NIGHT

As Ingalls passed through the door of the dance-hall in response to Peter's warning, the numbing consciousness of what he had done, of what he was, gave way to the instinct of self-preservation. His deed had been done in self-defense; it was her life or his. But who would voice the impulse? Who would listen if the voice should speak? The calm face! The growing crimson pool!

He shivered in nameless terror. He loosed the first horse he came to and sprang into the saddle.

"Ride for your life! Go! Ride!"

Ride from the awful sight! Ride from the awful, merciless vengeance of drink-crazed men! The sounding hoof-beats echoed from shadowed cliff, through the thin, still air, and every echo thrilled him with increasing terror. Ghostly hands reached out to clutch, and he bent forward till he lay prone on the neck of his horse. But the hoof-beats sounded louder, cries were ringing in his ears. Straggling clumps of brushwood stood out sharp and clear in the moonlight. More sharply and more clearly must he show. Louder and louder the sounding hoof-beats, clearly and more sharply the ringing cries of pursuit!

There were other horses standing ready as his had been. Thought was swift, but vengeance was swifter. Sharper and sharper the sounding hoof-beats, clearer yet the ringing cries!

He could endure the agony no longer. He pulled fiercely on the plunging horse, and turned wildly in the saddle. Only the cold, ghostly moonlight, the motionless brushwood, the shadowed cliffs! No sound but the husky throbbing of his own heart.

He was safe now. Safe! Safe! The rocking lope of his horse beat out the words in even cadence. He felt a wild exhilaration. Safe! Safe from the hands of vengeance! Again the nameless terror! Could he ride away from himself? From the still face? From the creeping, growing, crimson pool? Why had he fired the fatal shot? Why had he not fled when the weapon dropped from her hand?

A hot flush mounted his face. The unclean beast! How dared she take the name of his spotless wife upon her polluted lips?

A loathsome mass writhed and twisted into shape before him. The leering face of Smutty Mike, the mocking chorus, the oily thrust of the Big Swede, "Go home to your little Mary! Her fleece is not so white as it was!" A choking, stifling gasp! Had he taken an unjust vengeance? Had he risked his life in defense of what was not? Fool! Fool! Blind, trusting fool!

Point by point, and line by line, the scenes of

the last few hours marshaled themselves before him with the full force of their sinister possibilities. Chase's plausible warnings, the redemption of the mortgages, his insistence upon their transfer to Mary; how sharp and clear it all was, now his eyes were opened!

The cowardly, sneaking coyote!

Involuntarily he caught his breath. This meant not only collusion, but assent on the part of his wife. For a moment he was staggered by the thought. But no! There was no other possible conclusion. Chase would not have dared to go so far without encouragement amounting to consent. There was no other way.

What had he done to deserve this heartless treatment? If only they had fled together the burden would have been easier to bear. But to stay, hidden under his unsuspecting, trusting innocence, playing upon his confiding friendship, blinding him to what was plain to all who would see! A swelling wave of self-pity swept over him, suffusing his eyes with maudlin tears.

Only for a moment! Then anger, fierce and overpowering, flamed hot and withering at the thought of the stinging gibes in the dance-hall. In these there was no condemnation for the sinners; only scorn for himself.

A sudden thought stung every dormant nerve into tingling action. Chase knew of his every movement. He himself had been made to leave a clear field for their shameless plots. This very

day he had been made to tell his plans, hour by hour, for the coming week. And he, unsuspecting fool, had walked into the open snare! He laughed aloud. Their plot had been carefully laid, but chance had foiled them. He would be calm! He would be just! They should have a fair chance! But if they were guilty? Ah! If they were guilty, they should find that trusting innocence could become a terrible avenger. He had risked his life in defense of her honor. If they were guilty, theirs should be forfeited in defense of his own.

He no longer listened for sounds of pursuit. A treacherous friend! A faithless wife!

Through the moonlight he saw the little range house. A single light glówed softly through the shadow. Unconsciously Ingalls still carried in his hand the weapon. As his straining horse came to a halt, there was a whinnying challenge. Ingalls recognized Chase's horse in the little inclosure. At the sight the last vestige of manhood left him. As he flung himself from the saddle, Peter, a fateful second too late, was at his side and tried to detain him with outstretched hand.

"Read! Read!" he gasped.

Peter was beaten down.

Only the outward semblance of a human being dashed up the steps and burst open the door.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HARVEST OF THE WHIRLWIND

"I THOUGHT you would come."

The face that was lifted to Chase was pallid with suffering. The welcoming smile only intensified the drawn lines. Chase had paused for an instant on the threshold to nerve himself for the coming interview. The instant was enough for him to anticipate Mary's state of mind. Her words did not surprise him.

"Did you call me?"

The question was explanatory, not apologetic. She understood.

"I was in trouble. I was thinking of you. I think I must have been sleeping. I had a terrible dream." The short sentences were spoken in a dreary monotone. With the last words, she looked up at him again with the same drawn smile.

Chase felt it all, the bitter, lonely struggle.

"Has your husband been here?"

"No. Why do you ask? Have you seen him?"

"Yes, this afternoon. He was going to Manzanita. I think he intends to go down to the La Sals." Chase could not answer her first question. He felt that there was no need for an answer.

Mary did not reply immediately. Her nervous

fingers were wandering over the fringe of a light shawl. Her face gave no sign of the restlessness her fingers expressed.

"I can see no hope for the future. I have been over it all. I can see no hope." Again the dreary monotone.

Chase's lips were tightly compressed. Pity, helpless, forbidden, helpless because forbidden, indignation, fierce resentment, showed in the tense lips.

"Perhaps it is not as hopeless as you think."

She looked up at him with questioning eyes.

"I did not intend to tell you. I think you will know why; but now I think I must."

He was master of himself. He looked steadily into the eyes resting eagerly on his face.

"I did not want to tell you many things, because I cannot avoid speaking of myself, and because I must also speak of your husband. Now I think it would be wrong to refrain."

Rapidly but clearly he went over as much of his past experience as would serve to make plain his course of action. Sharply he pictured the terrible fascination of the prospector's life that laid hold upon the souls of even the strongest men, the hidden dangers that only the strongest could meet and conquer, then the utter uselessness of trying to stem the torrent of desire till the fever had wasted its strength in fruitless effort.

"Yesterday," he concluded, "your husband was a hopeless wreck. Now his future is his own."

He told her of her husband's entanglements, how he had been freed from them, passing lightly over his own part. As she listened to his words, her color came and went, in her eyes was the light of unquestioning trust. Her fingers had ceased to wander. They grasped firmly the arms of her chair as she leaned forward to catch the slightest modulations of his voice. Suddenly her expression changed, a deathly pallor overspread her face. Slowly she spoke from between compressed lips.

"Your victory is complete, but it is too late."

"Too late?" He did not grasp her meaning, even as she failed to compass his.

She sprang to her feet with flashing eyes.

"Is there no wrong a man can do a woman which she is not bound to forgive?"

He tried to speak, but she waved him imperiously aside.

"Yesterday I could have forgiven everything. To-day" — She fell back in her chair, shielding her burning face with her hands, her body shaken with harsh, dry sobs.

He knew it all, felt it all; the shameful humiliation of that day in Manzanita. He could not take his eyes from the quivering figure before him. He held himself by a mighty effort that showed in his set face. He thought he had conquered himself, his love; but the battle raged fiercer than before. The one he loved, deserted and alone! And he must see it all and stretch forth no helping hand. What is cold reason that it should sit in

unresponsive judgment before a woman's breaking heart? What voice in heaven, or earth, or hell that shall cry, "Unclean! unclean!" to the love that springs unbidden from the soil of harrowed souls? He leaned forward to take the fatal step, but his feet refused to move. He clenched his hands till the nails bit deep into his flesh.

"I think you misunderstand me." He spoke gently and with perfect control, but to himself his voice sounded hollow and far away.

Gradually Mary quieted herself. At his words her hands dropped slowly from her face, but her eyes were not raised.

"But what am I to do? What can I do? I am terribly alone." The voice was again dreary with lifeless hope.

Chase drew his breath sharply. For a moment he shrank from the responsibility thrust upon him. Only for a moment. He spoke calmly, but there was undoubting decision in his every word.

"You have been irredeemably wronged. You may forgive the wrong; you must not now put it beyond your power to forgive yourself. Your way is plain. You must see your husband once more. You must tell him all. The next step may be hard, but you must go to your friends, to those who have a right to shield you and to guard you."

She hardly moved while he was speaking; only when he spoke of her seeing her husband again did she manifest any emotion.

"I don't want to see my husband again. I can't bear it."

"You must. Your future depends upon it."

"Is there no other way?"

"No other that I can see."

On the mantel the clock beat out the passing hours with even strokes. There was a premonitory whirr. One! two! three! Mournfully the throbbing echoes died away into silence. The time had come to part.

"Good-by." Chase turned to go.

"Good-by." The voice was scarcely audible.

There came the sound of frantic hoof-beats. Crashing footsteps pounded on the piazza floor; the door was burst open. Disheveled, passion-torn, with voiceless, writhing lips, Ingalls stood before them. Peter was clinging to his beating arm, his face wild with fear. The crumpled letter was dashed from his hand and fluttered to the floor.

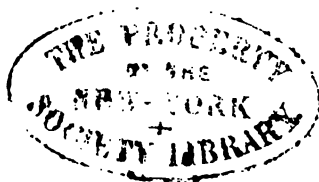
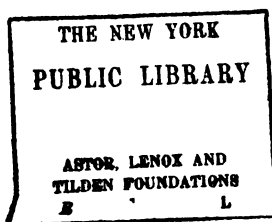
Ingalls freed his arm.

As Mary sprang to her feet, Chase caught her to shield her in his arms; but it was too late.

A deafening crash! The room was filled with stifling smoke.

Another way had opened.

The harvest of the whirlwind was garnered in.



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